The boy scouts on crusade

Leslie W Quirk

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THE BOY SCOUTS ON CRUSADE

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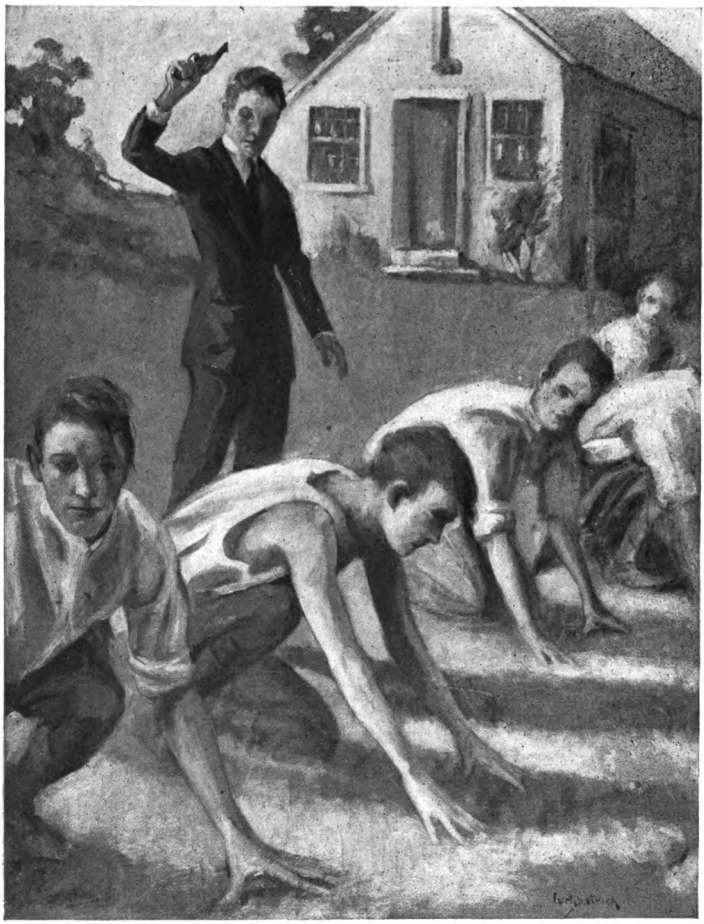

The first trial sent Bunny into the lead. FRONTISPIECE.
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THE BOY SCOUTS ON CRUSADE

LESLIE W. QUIRK

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS BY
WILLIAM KIRKPATRICK

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1919

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THE BOY SCOUTS ON CRUSADE

CHAPTER I

LUCK

"Missed!"

Specs McGrew frowned. Thrown too high, the pebble had overshot its mark and thudded noiselessly upon the soggy shingles. He had meant to peg squarely against the windowpane, of course, and in this way awaken the sleeping boy without disturbing the entire household.

"Roundy! O-o-oh, Roundy!" he called in a hoarse whisper.

The only answer sounded very much like a snore. Hang the luck! Why wasn't Roundy Magoon awake and up, as he had promised to be?

Specs looked about for something else to throw. If he could only find a handful of gravel instead of this soft loam, or, better, a whole gallon of gravel. Hold on! That suggested an idea, a smashing idea; and, with a chuckle, Number 5 of the Black Eagle

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Patrol of Boy Scouts ran to the old stepladder lying on its side near the barn. As a stepladder, it was a pretty poor specimen; but it would at least serve to raise him some ten feet nearer Roundy's second-story window. So, having propped its decrepit legs in place, Specs ran to the pump and filled the long-handled dipper to the brim. Roundy would think the lake was splashing in through the window!

The scheme was well enough planned, and no doubt Roundy would have caught a first class dousing if it had not been for faithful Felix. Felix was the Magoons' dog, but he included in his affections all the friends of the family and particularly the Black Eagle Patrol. Just as Specs was balancing on the top of the ladder, Felix crawled out from under the barn to investigate, barking joyfully, and placed two affectionate paws on the lower rung.

This was too much for the stepladder, which had been born tired and was only waiting for an excuse to crumple up. Slowly it began to lean like a toppling tree, while Specs, in a last valiant effort to save the day, dashed the water toward Roundy's window.

But he was too late. The spray slapped against the side of the house and, to the accompaniment of Felix's delirious barking, Specs sprawled down into the remains of an early spring garden. To cap his humili-

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ation, just as he was brushing the dirt from his clothes, he heard Roundy's voice at the window:

"Ladies and gentlemen, the next number on the program will be Mr. Specs DeVallo, youngest and greatest of the famous Flying DeVallos, in his death-defying feat, the Leap for Life!—How are you, Specs?"

Quite forgetting the Scout law which says one should always be cheerful, Specs glowered at Roundy's moonlike face. "I'd be all right," he snapped, "if you'd get up in time."

Roundy only smiled the wider. "Aw, Specs, think of those fish we're going to catch! Think of that brand-new high school we're going to have—with a gymnasium! Think of that circus that isn't going to come to Lakeville! Think—"

Roundy's smile was so irresistible that, in spite of himself, Specs found himself smiling back. "All right, Roundy, I'll do the thinking, and you do the dressing—and hurry up about it, too!"

Four minutes later, with the sun's advance guard driving the morning mists away, Roundy opened the kitchen door, fishpole in hand. Felix, having been solemnly warned to stay home and behave himself like a good dog, dropped his tail between his legs as the two boys started down the road. Twice, as he watched them vanish into the distance, they halted:

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once to look at the corner lot owned by Mr. Albertson, where, if the hopes of the Black Eagle Patrol were to be gratified, the little village of Lakeville would build its first high school; and again, in front of the blacksmith shop, to feast their eyes on the three-sheet poster of Campbell's Circus which depicted the Flying DeVallos.

"See that little fellow, Specs, that—that kid, making the long leap to the trapeze. I'll bet he isn't any older than we are. Well, that's who I'd like to be."

"Who wouldn't!" Spec's rejoinder, however, was without enthusiasm. He seemed to be thinking of something else. "Look here, Roundy," he said suddenly, "as long as we can't any of us go to Harrison City and see the circus, let's have a *regular* good time."

Roundy seemed puzzled, but was quite willing.

"Here's what I mean," Specs explained. "The patrol decided to go across the lake and fish. Now, you know as well as I do that there's nothing over at Feather Point except a lot of measly perch."

"Sure. But where do you want to go, Specs?"

Specs McGrew threw his right arm out in a magnificent gesture. "'Way up the lake to Shadow Island, that's where. You can get bass there, and pickerel and—"

"But the patrol decided—"

"I know what you're going to say. You're going

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to tell me that a Scout must be loyal and obey his patrol leader, and all that. But don't you see that's only so while he's hiking with the patrol? There isn't any Scout law that says you've got to go on a certain hike, is there?"

After a moment's thought, Roundy agreed there wasn't.

"All right, then. Here's what we'll do. We'll talk it over with the fellows, and, if they want to be reasonable and go to Shadow Island, all right. If they don't, though, they can go across the lake in Handy's launch, just as they decided at the patrol meeting, and you and I will take your rowboat and pull to Shadow Island. What do you say?"

Roundy was willing. "Only," he added cautiously, "if we do, you've got to do half the rowing."

They reached the log clubhouse, built by the patrol, to find the other six Black Eagles gathered and waiting,—although perhaps "waiting" is too peaceful a word to describe what was happening.

From one of the trapezes slung from the roof, Biceps Jones was swinging with his knees doubled over the bar, like the ball at the end of a long pendulum, while, on the big shelf over the fireplace, squatted Bunny Payton, patrol leader and youngest and smallest of the Scouts. He was preparing to leap toward Bi's clawing hands.

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"He'll get hurt if he misses that jump," remarked Specs cheerfully.

The onlookers received this remark with scorn.

"They've done it twice already," said Napoleon Meeker.

"You watch and see," grunted Handy Wallace.

"They're just as good as the Flying DeVallos," added Herbert Zane, more familiarly known as S. S., a contraction of his first nickname of Spick and Span.

"Yes, and better," declared Sandy Anvers, the newest member of the patrol. "Of course, Bunny doesn't leap and catch another bar, the way the kid does on the circus posters, but—"

"All ready!" shouted Bi as the trapeze, having reached its apex at the farther end of the room, began its return swing.

"All right, Bi!"

"Now, just watch!" whispered Sandy.

Along the lower arc of a great circle, Bi swung back toward the fireplace. As he approached, he breathed a quick, "Now!"

At the word, Bunny jumped. His hands clutched Bi's wrists and Bi's gripped his. Their arms, half bent, straightened out to their fullest. *Swi-i-ish* they went hurtling through the air, with Bunny's legs doubling to prevent a collision with the floor.

But the trick was not yet over. They swept along

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toward the other end of the room. There, with a heave of his arms, Bunny launched out into the air, revolving in a back flip. As surely, even if not as gracefully as the youngest DeVallo might have done it, he made the turn and landed right-side-up on the clubhouse floor.

Even Specs joined in the applause.

Bunny seemed embarrassed. "It isn't much," he said. "At the Y. M. C. A. in Chicago, last month, a fellow taught me how to do the back flip from the floor. And this is easier yet, of course, because I'm more than a quarter way around before Bi lets go."

In the meantime, Bi had dropped from the trapeze and was impatiently selecting his fishpole from the stack in the corner. "Now that we're all here," he suggested, "let's start."

There was a rush for the fishing tackle and lunch baskets, followed by another stampede for the door. Nap and S. S. brought up the rear. Nap had almost forgotten a most interesting book on Napoleon that he intended to read on the trip, and S. S. refused to appear on the street until he had brushed his coat for the second time that morning.

"Shall we tell the bunch now?" queried Roundy.

Specs shook his head. "Wait till we get to the lake. That's best. Wait—and then put it up to them."

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Though the village of Lakeville boasted a long shore line, its boathouses, for the most part, were clustered near "Benz Brothers' Boat Livery." Next to this public building huddled the little shack where Handy Wallace's uncle sheltered his rowboat. Out in the lake, chained to a buoy, lay the launch. Handy had thrown open the front doors, preparatory to putting the tender overboard, when Specs introduced his plan.

"Look here, fellows," he said, trying hard to assume a careless air, "where are we going?"

Bunny's eyes opened wide. "Why, straight across, of course, over to Feather Point. Don't you remember we decided that at the last patrol meeting? Mr. Stanton is to ride over on his bike and meet us there."

The fact that the Scout Master was also a part of the expedition had been overlooked by Specs, but his quick brain found a way out of the difficulty. They could leave a note for Mr. Stanton, he suggested, if some of them thought Shadow Island might be a better place to go.

"Why, I thought—" began Bunny. He halted abruptly. "Of course," he agreed with a smile, "we can change our minds if we want to. Let's put it to a vote, fellows. How many are for Feather Point?" With the exception of Specs and Roundy, every Scout raised his hand. "Majority rules," decided the leader, "so I guess we'll go to Feather Point."

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"I'm going to Shadow Island," announced Specs, "and so is Roundy. And I'll tell you why." Rather excitedly, he explained his theory of their right to do as they pleased. "So you see," he finished, "Roundy and I don't have to worry about the loyalty law or the obedience law, because it's just as though we didn't come around this morning. There's nothing to compel a Scout to go on a hike if he doesn't want to, is there?"

Bunny's face wore a worried expression. He thought a long moment before replying. "All right, Specs," he said finally, "if you feel that way about it, I've nothing to say. Suppose you and Roundy help us run the tender out before you go?"

Glad of the chance to change the subject, the two rebels took eager hold of the rowboat. For some reason, Specs did not feel especially proud of his victory. He had expected more opposition; he had wanted the satisfaction of either convincing the patrol that his was the right way or of giving in like a martyr. As things had turned out, he felt simply a little ashamed of himself.

The boat was large and unwieldy, and it always demanded all the strength of the eight boys to budge it from the floor. This morning, however, to Specs' surprise, it was particularly stubborn. In spite of the sixteen hands on the gunwale, it moved no more than

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if it were solid rock. Even Bi's hard muscles and Roundy's weight proved wholly in vain.

Specs stared at the other seven boys, put his head between his shoulders, and then stared again. Suddenly, he saw what was wrong.

"Bunny," he shouted angrily, "you're not helping; you're pulling the wrong way."

The patrol stopped in the middle of a mighty heave. Bunny was placid and calm.

"No," he said. "I may be pulling the wrong way for you, but I'm pulling the right way for me. You see, you fellows are trying to get the boat out through the front door, but I'm trying to take it out through the back one. That's why I am pulling in the other direction, and that's why I fastened the painter to this scantling. It may be a lot of trouble to take it out through the back door, but I am trying just as hard as I can to do it."

There was a moment of pained silence following this speech, interrupted by the chuckles of the others, including even the revolting Specs. By his little strategy, Patrol Leader Payton had turned the tables completely.

"Don't you see, Specs," he said earnestly, "it's—it's more than just living up to the letter of the Scout laws; it's trying to live up to what's behind the words. If you and Roundy don't want to go on a hike, no-

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body can make you trail along with the rest of us. In a way, you won't be disobeying anybody, and you won't be disloyal. Only it means that we six won't have as good a time as though you were along, and it may mean that the next time somebody else will want to go his own way and spoil that hike. If that keeps up, the patrol will go to smash sure." He leaned nearer the others. "Specs, don't you see it? Don't you see that we can't get anywhere unless we all work together all the time? Don't you see that every one of us, if we want to keep the Black Eagles alive, must sacrifice some of the things he wants to do for the benefit of the others? Isn't it worth it? Don't we all get ten times out of the patrol what we put into it?"

"I—I guess you're right," Specs said slowly, "only I—I never figured it out before. I'll go to Feather Point, and I guess Roundy will, too." With a funny twist of his right hand, he made the Scout salute. "All right, Mr. Patrol Leader, from now on I'm with the procession. Let's get the boat out—the front way!"

With the painter unhitched from the scantling, and with eight backs straining over the job, the boat scarcely hesitated. Lightly it slid across the landing into the water.

Bi wiped the sweat from his forehead. "I wish,"

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he said feelingly, "that launch would chug us right over to Harrison City and the circus."

The others agreed eagerly.

"I guess the reason I got out of bed on the wrong side this morning," said Specs apologetically, "was because I felt grouchy over missing the circus."

"Why don't circuses ever come to Lakeville, anyhow?" asked Bunny, as Handy, having made the tender fast to the buoy, climbed into the launch.

Specs flared back impatiently. "Why doesn't anything ever come to Lakeville? The town hasn't any luck, that's the reason."

Handy started the launch, heading across the lake toward Feather Point.

"Napoleon once said," began Nap, "that—"

"Huh!" snapped Specs. "Even Napoleon couldn't do anything in a town like Lakeville. We just haven't any luck. We're not any smaller than a lot of other places with high schools, are we? But have we got a high school? Not so you could notice it. And just because of that, we lost Buck Sawyer and Judge Lloyd, who went to that military academy, and next year we'll lose Anvers and Zane and maybe more."

Bunny objected. "But next year, Specs, we may have a high school. You know, Mr. Stanton—"

Specs nodded wisely. "Yes, I know Mr. Stanton's going to see Mr. Burbage this morning, and I know

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just what will happen, too. Mr. Burbage will pull those whiskers of his and say that *he* never went to high school, and he can't see why anybody else has to go to high school, and, as long as he's mayor of Lakeville, he's going to keep the village from throwing away money like *that.*"

The laughter which greeted Specs' imitation of Lakeville's mayor ended the subject of the high school. Sandy Anvers threw overboard a spoon hook at the end of a trolling line, with the idea of snaring some unwary pickerel. Nap pulled out his book to read about his favorite hero in history. Bunny took the wheel, allowing Handy to coax the engine to its highest efficiency. Specs, Roundy, Bi, and S. S., forming themselves into an impromptu quartet, began to sing something about a bulldog on a bank and a bullfrog in a pool.

In this way, the time passed quickly. To most of them, indeed, it seemed they had hardly started before they were close to the jutting peninsula of land known as Feather Point.

"How about going to the other side?" Bunny suggested. "We can see the road from there, and Mr. Stanton can see us if—"

"Wow!"

It was a sudden frightened gasp from Roundy Magoon.

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Immediately the patrol was aroused. "What's the matter, Roundy? Sick? See something?"

Roundy stammered. "I—I don't know, fellows, but—over there, through the trees, I mean—well, I thought I saw an elephant."

The boat was rounding the Point.

"You've been eating mince pie again," laughed Specs, "and you think this is the dream that comes after you've gone to bed. Wrong, Roundy! Wake up! What was your elephant doing? Floating through the air, maybe?"

Roundy shook his head. "No, I—I saw it behind those trees yonder."

"Yes, indeed," said Specs, pursing his lips, "they're getting awful thick in this part of the country, aren't they? Seems to me the State should offer a bounty for their tusks. Keep 'em down to reasonable numbers, you know, so they won't become a public nuisance."

Roundy did not answer in words. Instead, he pointed with an unsteady finger.

The patrol stared open-mouthed. For a moment, so great was his astonishment, Bunny forgot his duties as helmsman.

They had cleared the tip of Feather Point with the launch; and there in the sheltered cove, with the horses cropping the grass and the drivers stretched

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sleeping on the ground, was a regiment of red and gold circus wagons. Behind the shrubbery, slowly and judiciously twisting fodder into its mouth, stood Roundy's elephant.

The circus which should have been at Harrison City was camped at Feather Point.

"Talk about luck!" breathed Specs McGrew.

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CHAPTER II

THE CIRCUS BOY

A circus it was; no doubt as to that. The sight of the little, old-fashioned outfit, that creaked its way across country in a score of wagons, gave Bunny a sudden thrill. It seemed nearer to him than those performances boasting of three rings and two platforms, housed under an acre of canvas; more real, somehow, and easier to understand.

There were a dozen intimate touches about the "camp," too, that under no other circumstances could have been glimpsed by outsiders. On a line, stretched between two trees, flapped a black-spotted clown suit, with a purple toga, such as a chariot driver might wear, on one side of it and a small pair of green tights on the other. The size of this latter garment made Bunny conclude that it might well prove to be the property of the youngest DeVallo. Behind one of the closed wagons, a swarthy man with a black moustache was attempting a juggling trick with three plates and two knives—and failing. Stretched out on the grass were the ropes and bar of a regular trapeze; appar-

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ently, somebody had been splicing a break. And finally, of course, there was the great, hulking elephant that Roundy had seen from the boat.

Nor was the elephant the only animal in sight. Although most of the cage-wagons were closed, here and there a side had been removed, revealing furry captives nosing the bars.

"Look at the monkeys!" shouted Roundy.

"And the hyena!" Sandy pointed at the last wagon in line.

"And the black bear!" chortled Specs.

The bear! As Bunny caught sight of the animal, he felt a slight quiver of fear. He knew well enough that the black bear would much rather eat a mess of berries than a Boy Scout, but that knowledge did not end his discomfort. It was just such another fear as he had known on Shadow Island the night he had joined the patrol.[1]

But he squared his shoulders with a resolute jerk. "I'm afraid of bears," he confessed to himself. "There isn't any reason for it, but I am. Well, that sort of thing won't do in a patrol leader; so, no matter how scared I am, I must act as if I wasn't."

"Listen!" said Nap delightedly as a sudden roar drowned the other noises. "That's the lion."

Handy grunted. "There's something more inter-

1 See *The Boy Scouts of Black Eagle Patrol.* 1915.

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esting than lions to think about," he declared. "Do you fellows know why Campbell's Circus is here?" As nobody spoke, he answered his own question. "Look at the mud on the wagons. They showed at Fairview yesterday, and they are billed for Harrison City to-day. That means something happened between the two towns, and I can tell you what it was. The whole shooting match got stuck on the Wilson Swamp road."

Bunny studied the bemired wheels and the exhausted drivers and horses. Handy was right. After a night of hard pulling, the circus could go no farther without a rest. But this bit of logic was tagged with another conclusion that made him gasp. Perhaps the cages had been weakened by the strain, especially that cage in which the black bear paced restlessly back and forth. As patrol leader, it was Bunny's right, if he chose, to command the patrol to stay out and fish, but—well, he guessed this plan would hardly suit. He frowned over his fear and put it as far from him as possible.

"How about it, fellows?" he demanded. "Do we vote to land?"

There wasn't a single voice that said "No." Some whooped, "Sure!" and "Yes," and "Well, I should say so!" Bi shouted, "And right off!"

Handy throttled the engine till the flywheel barely

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turned. "Somewhere along here, Bunny, there's a natural landing."

It was Bi who plunged an oar into the water to sound the depth. "Plenty deep enough close in by this shelf of rock," he announced. "Run alongside."

The landing was accomplished with so much success that even Specs expressed approval. Having made fast to an oak near the shore line, they stood still for a moment, not quite certain of their next step. The juggler had vanished, presumably discouraged over his inability to keep the three plates and two knives in the air at one time. The sleeping drivers snored peacefully. Nobody else was in sight. In a way, of course, any circus was a sort of public museum, Bunny told himself, and people had a right to look it over. But in the present case, with owners and performers asleep or busy behind closed wagon sides, it didn't seem exactly the thing to march into the midst of the camp.

To end these doubts, a small boy came suddenly into view, clambering from one of the wagons. He was rather a sorry looking object, being barefooted and clad in nothing more than a torn white shirt and a pair of short, checkered pants. But his appearance created something of a sensation among the Black Eagle Patrol.

"St. Helena!" exclaimed Nap. "I believe that

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fellow came right out of the lion's cage. Maybe he's a tamer."

Specs was his usual scornful self. "Lion tamer your grandmother!" he retorted. "The lion's cage is next to the monkeys'; can't you see the picture painted on the outside? That kid came out of one of the sleeping-wagons. Probably a dish-washer or general roustabout."

The boy came nearer. He appeared so much at ease and so generally self-possessed that he was irritating.

"Hello!" he remarked coolly.

"Hello, yourself!" shot back Specs.

The stranger pulled a soft ball from his pocket and tossed it between his hands. "Where you from?"

"Lakeville," Bunny told him, forestalling Specs' rejoinder.

"Lakeville?" The boy stopped passing the ball to scratch his tousled head. "Lakeville, eh? Oh, yes, I remember. It's a little burg across the lake somewhere. You see," he explained, "when you travel around the way circus folks do, you don't hear of much except the towns worth while. You can't expect a fellow to remember the name of every hick town on the map."

His contemptuous tone irritated the entire patrol, particularly Specs, who started to reply angrily.

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Bunny saved the situation by breaking into the conversation again.

"Why do you call Lakeville a hick town?" he asked. "What does that mean?"

The boy flipped the ball into the air, running a little to catch it.

"A hick town? Why, that means a town full of hicks—people who only think they're alive, you know; a town that's no good, that hasn't any life or pep in it; a dead and buried town. Of course, now, we show at some big places that are hick towns, but when a town is little and hick at the same time—good night! Say, I'll bet you fellows don't even know when it's Fourth of July, do you?"

To express his feelings, the boy threw the ball into the air again. The eight Scouts watched him in silent rage, unable to think of any fitting retort.

"Say," he began once more, "why are you fellows all dressed up like that?"

As patrol leader, it seemed to be Bunny's place to explain. "We're Boy Scouts," he said, "of the Black Eagle Patrol."

"Yes," put in Specs, "and we're the best patrol in the whole State, too, if anybody should ask you."

"But what do you do?" persisted the circus boy.

Bunny explained further, repeating the principal Scout laws.

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"You mean," sniffed the other, "that seven of you have to do what one of you says? You have to obey that—that kid you call the patrol leader?"

This was more than Specs, who forgot how lately he had been a rebel himself, could stand. "We don't do it because we have to," he snapped; "we do it because we want to. Nobody has to belong to the Boy Scouts."

The circus youngster nodded sagely. "That's all right. But, believe me, I'd never let any one fellow—no, nor any two fellows—tell me what I had to do. No, sir, not me! Anyhow, not unless they happened to be a lot bigger and stronger than I was myself." He tossed up his ball once more. "I do just as I please. That's me!"

Bunny attempted to set him right. "But you don't understand. It isn't like an army. It's—well, it's more like a club. The patrol elects the leader. And a leader is necessary because, when you're going on a hike or something like that, there are lots of things coming up that some one fellow ought to decide. Well, with us the Scout Master or the patrol leader decides them." Though Bunny was convinced himself, he felt he was not making much of an impression upon his grinning hearer. He tried harder. "To be loyal and obedient," he went on earnestly, "is just one way of getting things done. Every crowd of fel-

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lows that I ever heard of had some rules to follow, even if they never heard of the Boy Scouts. This is our"—he tried to think of a more forcible word—"this is our gang. We stick by each other and by—by what we believe in. Of course, every fellow has to give up some of the things he wants to do, but, to pay for that, he's able to do a lot of things with a crowd that he couldn't do by himself. He gets more out of it than he puts in."

So interested had he become in explaining this part of the Scout creed that Bunny quite forgot he was making a speech, till the circus boy called his attention to it.

"Say, you ought to be a spieler in front of our side show. You talk like you were wound up. But you talk like a hick, just the same. Aw, it's a hick idea, this Boy Scout stuff. Anyhow," he added reflectively, "I don't guess it matters what a lot of hicks do or what they say, either."

Specs boiled over. "Who are you, anyway? What do you do? Pack the elephant's trunk for him? Or play with the monkeys?"

The patrol, which had stood just about as much as it could of the stranger's impertinence, snickered with laughter. The boy flushed.

"I'll tell you who I am," he said sharply. "Remember the Flying DeVallos on the posters? Well,

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I'm the youngest Flying DeVallo; I'm the one who makes the Leap for Life. See?"

Specs became suddenly silent. Bunny's heart began a mad thumping. The boy before them was no hanger-on from the cook's tent, but a real performer; an athlete who sailed through the air, from one trapeze to another, like a green meteor. It was out of the question, of course, but wouldn't it be GREAT if this smallest and youngest of the Flying DeVallos should stay behind in Lakeville!

The dream grew in the leader's mind. Give the other a fair chance, and he'd probably drop his superior attitude like a hot cake. He'd be just as chummy as any fellow in the patrol. And the tricks he could show them! Why, that clubhouse gymnasium would become a regular circus in no time at all. And the interesting things he could tell them! All about life in the circus: elephants, strong men, clowns, magicians, bareback riding, trained leopards, educated ponies—there was no end to his fund of knowledge.

Nap seemed to have the same idea. "Suppose we had a fellow like that in the patrol—wouldn't it be immense!" he whispered.

But Specs had his doubts. After the first stunning moment, he recovered himself enough to say belligerently, "All right, if you're the youngest Flying DeVallo, prove it."

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The boy raised his chin a little. "I don't have to prove it. I know who I am, and that's enough for me."

"But can't you do something for us?" suggested Bi. "Can't you even turn a handspring or flip?"

The boy's smile was sneering. "What you hicks want is a free show," he remarked coldly. "You come to the circus this afternoon and buy a ticket; then you'll see me do a lot of things."

It was not till this remark that Bunny began to question the truth of the boy's claim. "Do you think he's telling us a fish story?" he whispered to Bi.

"I think fish stories are the only kinds he knows," said Bi contemptuously. The spell of admiration that had held the patrol a moment before was melting away like ice in April.

"Give us a catch, kid," said S. S., quite as though he were addressing any ordinary new boy in town.

The youngest DeVallo, if he were really a DeVallo, shook his head slightly and began rolling the ball slowly between his palms.

"I'll tell you hicks one thing," he remarked. "You get a lot of time for playing ball; I don't get much of any. Just the same, I can throw better than any of you."

It was a direct challenge.

Specs advanced. "All right, Mr. DeValuable, we're going to eat breakfast pretty soon, but, before

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we start, we'll play a game of hat ball. That's where a good thrower shines. What about it?"

The circus boy did not seem enthusiastic when the game was explained to him. "If we play that," he objected, "all you fellows will pick on me and roll the ball into my hat every time."

"We won't, either," Bunny promised quickly. "We're Scouts, and we play fair."

"Besides, it wouldn't matter," Specs nagged. "You know you're such a wonder at throwing that none of us could dodge one of your swift ones."

"Oh, don't rub it in, Specs," Bunny advised under his breath. But Specs was beyond control.

"You're not afraid, are you? Afraid of a lot of hicks?"

That taunt settled it. The boy ran to his wagon (which, by the way, was not the lion's cage) and returned with a cap. Fifty feet from the lake shore, a stone fence divided two fields. Along one side of this natural barrier, the nine caps were ranged, crowns down and hollows up. Ten feet back of them, Bunny traced a "dead line" parallel with the wall; from behind this line, the players took turns in tossing the ball for the caps. If it failed to drop into one of them, the tosser put a chip or pebble in his own, as a penalty, and tried again; but if it landed fairly in one of the fellow's caps, its owner rushed across the

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dead line, scooped up the ball, and threw at the nearest player. Needless to say, as soon as the ball had definitely snuggled into a cap, all except its owner raced out of danger. The ball had to be thrown accurately and quickly. If it hit a player, he was penalized with a chip or pebble in his cap; if it missed, the thrower was penalized.

From the very beginning of this Scouts' game, the circus boy proved no more than an ordinary player. Though he dodged well, and, when his turn came, was usually able to toss the ball into one of the gaping caps, he was pretty small potatoes as a thrower. The Black Eagles were fair enough, as Bunny had promised, but the stranger seemed to get more than his share of pegs at them. To make matters worse, his arm was neither swift nor sure. Each time he tried, he missed, and each time, of course, the count was scored against him.

"Remember, fellows," warned Bunny, after they had been playing for ten or fifteen minutes, "it's time to be careful. The first one of us who gets five chips or pebbles in his cap loses. You know what that means: he must spread his hand against the wall and give us five shots at it with the ball. You've got three pebbles, Roundy; so have you, Nap; and you, S. S. And, DeVallo, you've got four. Better look alive now. All right, Sandy, toss it."

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The ball hit close to Bi's cap, bounced crookedly to the visor of DeVallo's, wavered uncertainly an instant, and then plumped into the crown. The boy ran wildly to it, and took an underhand snap throw at Specs. But Specs saw it coming just in time. He flattened out and avoided it; the ball hit a tree behind him and bounded back into the thrower's hands. The game was over.

"Five, Mister DeValuable!" chortled Specs. "Come on now; put your hand against that wall. First shot!"

With an angry grab at his cap, the boy shook the pebbles from it and clapped it upon his head.

"Nothing doing!" he muttered. "Not on your life! You hicks can't slip anything over on me like that. And you won't get the ball, either."

Specs apparently had other notions. But as he charged the circus boy, the latter threw the ball high into the air, lodging it on the flat top of a tall van.

"You hicks thought I was easy, didn't you?" His voice was exulting. "Let me tell you something. You can't pick on me any longer, because that's my father standing over there, watching us, and he's good and sore. If you try anything funny, he'll take a fall out of you that you'll remember."

Bunny glanced toward the wagons to the left. A strongly built, athletic type of man was staring at

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them, hands on his hips. Both his attitude and his expression spelled displeasure.

"He's going to tell you hicks a thing or two," the boy went on. "I shouldn't wonder if he gave all of you a sound licking for picking on me."

The members of the Black Eagle Patrol drew together uneasily.

"What—what are we going to do if he comes after us?" ventured Sandy, wetting his lips.

Bunny's mouth set determinedly. "Why, we've done nothing to be ashamed of. Let him come. If he doesn't want to be friendly, I guess we can take care of ourselves."

The man opened his mouth. He flung out a single sharp word.

"Jump!" he shouted.

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CHAPTER III

A ONE-RING BREAKFAST

Specs stiffened indignantly. "Talk about nerve! What does he think we are? Trained animals?"

Bi began to roll up his sleeves. "This land belongs to Mr. Albertson; he told me so once. Well, I'm not going to jump off till somebody says 'jump' who has a right to say 'jump.'"

It was Bunny, as usual, who smoothed things over. "Wait a minute, Bi; don't get mad. I think he's talking to young DeVallo."

Again the man shouted. "Jump!"

The circus boy turned sulkily. "Yes, sir?" he answered.

"Wobbling Waterloo!" exclaimed Nap. "His name is Jump."

"Jump, you climb up there and get that ball."

The boy scratched the ground with one foot, but made no move to obey the command. "I don't want to," he mumbled.

"Jump, do as I tell you."

"I—I don't want to."

Much to the annoyance of Specs, who was enjoy-

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ing immensely this humiliation of his late enemy, Bunny ended the strain by saying: "We'll get the ball for you. Come on, fellows—the wall-scaling stunt!"

With a shout of assent, the patrol started at double-quick for the high van on which the ball had lodged.

"Everybody up and over and down on the other side," ordered Bunny.

Now, it would have been comparatively easy to boost either Bunny or Sandy within reaching distance of the ball, but this method would not have given the Scouts a chance to demonstrate their skill at scaling a wall, an accomplishment recently mastered and one of which they were very proud.

So, like well trained soldiers, they fell into line, allowing Bi and Roundy to reach the base of the ascent first, and then scrambling up their bodies to their shoulders and from there to the wagon top, like a band of agile monkeys. The exhibition is always spectacular, particularly when well done, and never before had the Black Eagles climbed with more precision or speed. In less than a half-minute, they were down on the ground again with the ball. As the last one landed, the circus boy's father nodded a cordial "Good!"

"We've practised hard," Bunny admitted. "All eight of us can go over a ten-foot wall, with a fifty-yard run on each side, in thirty-two seconds. I guess

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that's pretty near the record, sir. But it took lots of practice."

"That's the only way to learn anything," the man agreed. "Who taught you the trick?"

"Why, you see, sir, we're Boy Scouts. Last summer, on a trip to New York City that we won as a prize, we saw a patrol do it there. As soon as we got back, we began trying it ourselves." Bunny paused, suddenly aware that he had been talking a good deal, and then remembered the purpose of the climb: "Here's the ball."

The man took it and tossed it to Jump, who was standing to one side, looking decidedly sullen. "I've heard of the Boy Scouts," his father said, "and I like what I've heard. I had an idea, though, that there was somebody older in charge of each squad."

"The Scout Master, you mean," suggested Bunny. "Our Scout Master is Mr. Stanton. He's going to meet us here this morning."

The man's face brightened. "Good! When your Mr. Stanton comes, I want to see him. It will be an hour, at least, before we are ready to move on. Jump!"

The boy scraped his throat.

"You have the ball now. I want to see you do the right thing with it." He looked steadily at the youngster, with an expression about his eyes that was

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neither reproach nor anger, but that suggested, rather, a puzzled disappointment. Turning, he climbed back into the wagon from which he had emerged.

Jump faced the group, ill at ease and with the beginnings of a flush on his face. After one or two trials, he managed to get the words out.

"I—I changed my mind," he said. "I want to finish the game. Not because my father told me to, but because I want to. It's up to me to let you throw at my hand, and I'm willing."

The unfavorable impression the boy had made on the patrol lessened a little. Plainly, he was sincerely ashamed of his childish conduct, and was trying to make up for it.

"I don't care," persisted Jump. "I'm not afraid of getting hurt or anything like that. Come on and throw."

He started toward the wall, but, perceiving that the others did not follow, stopped abruptly.

"Don't—don't you want to?"

Because the boy had offended against the whole patrol, Bunny felt it was scarcely within his right to decide whether or not the other Scouts should make friends again with the rebel. At the same time, it was on the tip of his tongue to urge the renewal of the game, when Specs arranged things by plumping down on the ground.

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"Excuse me," he said. "I don't play with babies. Haven't got time."

"Same here," agreed S. S., squatting beside Specs. "Besides, we might hurt your nice new ball."

"And I am afraid, if I hurt your hand," added Bi, with heavy humor, "your father might come out and give me a licking."

One by one, the members of the patrol settled down and looked scornfully at Jump, who, for the first time since they had seen him, appeared excessively uncomfortable.

"But you don't want to mind what we do," urged Nap, "because we're only a crowd of hicks."

"Oh, let's forget—" began Bunny.

"It will teach him a good lesson," whispered Bi.

Jump shifted from one foot to the other. "I—I wish you'd let me pay up."

Specs leaned back lazily. "I know. You're afraid we'll tell your father on you. Don't worry. We won't."

"That's not it," argued Jump, standing firmly on his widely planted feet. "I may not be used to playing with—with hicks, but I know I made a mistake, and now I want to do the right thing."

"Well," suggested Specs, "what you'd better do first is to hunt up the real DeVallo kid and tell him how you've been palming yourself off under his name."

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This was too much for Jump's temper; it flared. "I am one of the DeVallos," he shouted angrily, his voice quivering with indignation. "I'm the youngest Flying DeVallo, I tell you. I wasn't lying. I—I can prove what I am."

"What's he up to?" queried Bunny, as Jump raced over to a broad-backed white horse that was placidly nosing a pile of hay.

"Oh, he's going to put over some kind of a bluff," Specs answered; "but he won't get away with it while I'm watching. You'll see."

Apparently surprised, but not wholly unwilling, the white horse allowed himself to be led from the hay to a patch of level ground between the seated Scouts and the wagons. Here, grabbing hold of the mane, Jump clambered to the broad back.

"This isn't going to be easy," he explained. "In the first place, it's two years since I've done any real riding of this kind. Then, too, old Whitey hasn't anything to keep his head down, nor a ringmaster to keep him going, nor any resin on his back to keep my feet from slipping. But I'll prove I'm a regular performer, just the same."

"We're waiting," was Specs' dry comment.

The boy started the horse on an easy lope and promptly stood upright.

"He knows how to ride, anyhow," Bunny admitted

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as, after a pirouette or two, Jump leaped a good two feet into the air.

"Oh, he can stand up," Specs growled. "But who couldn't on a horse with a back like a barn floor?"

With some difficulty, the circus boy brought the horse to a stop, wheeled him about, and urged him into a lope over the return path.

"Now, watch!" he called.

Once more he gave a little trial leap; then, before the patrol realized what he was attempting, the boy turned a somersault in the air, a clean front flip, and landed safely upon the galloping horse. Not only was it a feat in itself, but all of them were fair enough to recognize the difficulties that made it harder and more dangerous than it would have been in a circus ring.

"Well, I'll be Waterlooed!" gasped Nap, who seemed to be the only member of the patrol capable of any comment whatever. Bunny felt instinctively glad that the boy had proved himself. Specs appeared divided between admiration and disappointment.

As Jump brought the white horse to a halt and slid off the broad back, he faced the Scouts. "Now, do you believe I am what I said I was?" he demanded, with a trace of his old superiority. "Say, do you believe me now?"

It was a most embarrassing moment for the Black Eagles, all of whom, from Specs to Bunny, felt prop-

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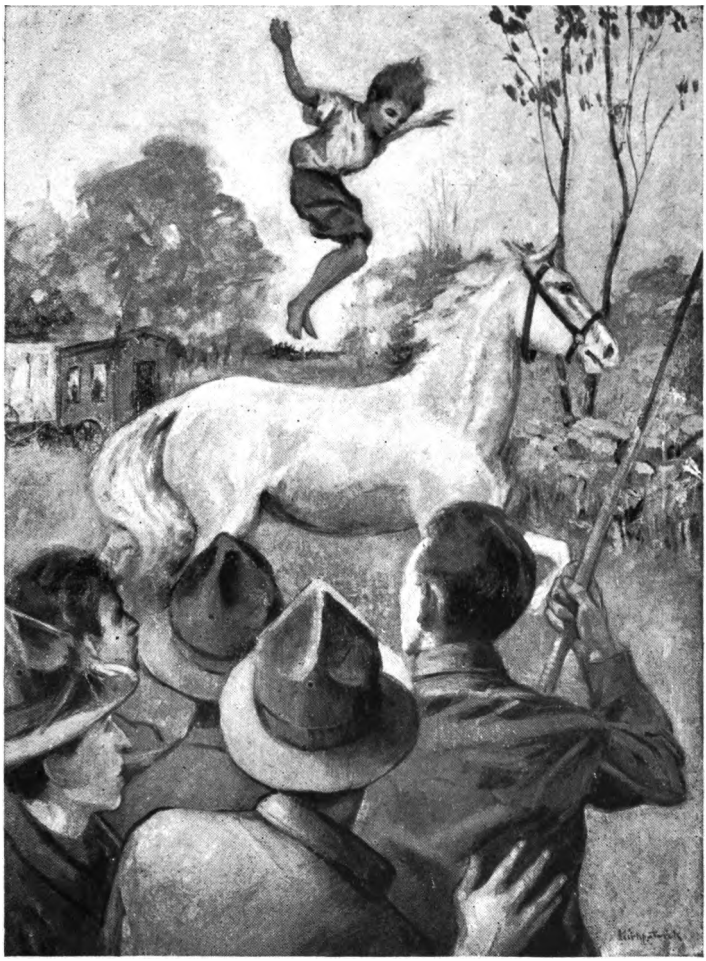

"Well, I'll be Waterlooed!" gasped Nap. *Page 36.*

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erly ashamed of themselves. Luckily for their feelings, the arrival of Mr. Stanton and Jump's father changed the situation so suddenly that it was unnecessary to say anything.

The Scout Master, leaning his bicycle against a tree, advanced with a smile. "Boys, we seem to be in luck this morning. We see the best part of the circus, even if Harrison City pays for it."

Jump's father introduced himself. "Mr. Stanton? Your boys have been telling me about you. My name is Henderson. And this is my son, Ward. Around the circus, we call him 'Jump.'"

"Aw, he said he was the youngest DeVallo," shouted Specs triumphantly. "Yes, sir, he told us he was one of the Flying DeVallos."

Mr. Henderson grinned broadly. "Well, he is; so am I. But our name is Henderson. You see, DeVallo is just one we use on the posters. The names of the other two DeVallos are Dean and Reilly. They call us the DeVallo family, but, as a matter of fact, Jump and I are the only ones in the troupe who are related."

It was a sad blow to Specs. Jump, after starting to make a face at his late doubter, decided not to. Mr. Henderson went on:

"I've just asked the cook if he could entertain a few more at breakfast, and he says he's perfectly willing, provided you boys take pot luck with the rest of us.

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Fact is, we had a terrible night of it, pulling through a soggy marsh road back there. After crawling through it, the G. M.—that's the general manager—had them hitch up the freshest horses to the tent wagons, and sent them on to Harrison City, while we rested up here. I don't know whether we'll make our stop in time for the parade, but— There goes the breakfast call."

When they thought about it afterwards, it seemed to the Black Eagle Patrol quite the most wonderful breakfast any boy ever ate. The food was ordinary enough, except in point of quantity. But the fellow breakfasters made the meal stand out as a memory that would last forever. There were no tables. Each one of them walked to the cook's temporary open-air kitchen with his plate, had it filled, and then returned and squatted in a great circle with the performers and "artists": musicians in red and black uniforms; drivers sitting on their heavy, ragged overcoats; the juggler, now in a very good humor, tossing bits of bread into the air and bouncing them off his nose into his mouth, to Roundy Magoon's vast delight; Mr. Reilly, of the Flying DeVallos, keeping Sandy and S. S. in a gale of chuckles with his jokes; the clown—only he didn't look any more like a clown than a preacher—talking very earnestly to Nap about the great Napoleon, and actually telling the boy new facts

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about the little Corsican leader; the strong man, juggler of cannon balls, allowing them to feel his muscles; a mother and her pretty daughter, bareback riders, insisting on making bread and bacon sandwiches for Specs and Handy; the—but there was no end, apparently, to the circus crowd.

Jump sat next to Mr. Dean, another of the Flying DeVallos. His father sat on one side of the Scout Master and Bunny on the other. Though it had been a hard night for the circus people, the presence of the Scouts seemed to lend a general gaiety. Everybody laughed and was bubbling over with high spirits, with the possible exception of Mr. Henderson.

He seemed very intent and much in earnest as he talked to Scout Master Stanton. In fact, he talked so vigorously that, quite without wishing to eavesdrop, Bunny could not help hearing occasional fragments of the conversation.

"I honestly believe Jump is a good boy at heart," Mr. Henderson was saying, "but he's in a fair way of being spoiled. This circus life is bad for him. His head is too big. He's babyish. He's becoming selfish and insubordinate." Bunny wasn't sure what that last big word meant, but he had a pretty good idea of what was the matter with Jump. "Before his mother died," Mr. Henderson went on, "she seemed to keep him in order, but I apparently haven't the

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knack of it. I can't beat him, because I don't believe in beating boys; but something must be done if he isn't to be absolutely spoiled."

"What he needs," the Scout Master suggested, "is healthy contact with other boys of his own age. No circus—"

"I know what you are going to say," interrupted Mr. Henderson. "No circus is a good place for a growing boy. You're right; it isn't. Now, if I could only leave him with some manly crowd of youngsters like your Scouts—"

Mr. Stanton was silent.

Jump's father took up the thread of his talk again. "There must be some way to save him. He's a good boy at heart, but he has been spoiled here, mostly because he's the only little fellow with the 'big top.' Besides, there's another reason why I want him to drop out of the circus just at this time. The climax of our act on the trapezes is what we call 'The Leap for Life.' Well, last week—"

Mr. Henderson's voice lowered till it became inaudible to Bunny. Whatever it was he said, the words seemed to have changed the Scout Master's opinion about the desirability of caring for Jump in Lakeville. Instead of opposing further the plan, he suggested ways and means. The head of the Flying DeVallos grew more cheerful.

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As the breakfast ended, the scene changed abruptly to one of activity. The cook and his helpers scooped up plates, cups, knives, forks, and spoons; the drivers threw harnesses upon the horses; cage sides were clamped into place. Obviously, the circus was making ready to resume its cross-country journey.

Mr. Stanton called Bunny to one side. Jump followed.

"Bunny," the Scout Master began, "Mr. Henderson and I have been talking things over. He wants his son to spend the summer in Lakeville. Now, may I promise that the whole patrol, and especially you, will look out for him?"

Jump took a step forward. "I'm not going to stay behind," he argued, "unless I can be the leader of the patrol. I'm not going to let any other kid tell me what to do. I've traveled more, and I've had more experience, and I can do more tricks, and I—I know more than any of your kids. I've got to be the leader."

The Scout Master smiled. "That's all right. Bunny here was elected patrol leader inside of a year; perhaps you'll have the same luck. But, of course, like all the rest, you'll have to learn to be a Scout before you even join the patrol. First, you'll be a tenderfoot—"

"A tenderfoot! You mean, I can't even be a regular Scout?"

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"Oh, you'll work up fast enough, once you pass the tenderfoot requirements and tests."

Jump stared at the Scout Master for a long moment. Then, his face contracting into a frown, he turned and, without a word, walked back toward the wagons.

"You see how he acts," said Bunny. "I don't believe anybody can do much with him."

"I'm not so sure," Mr. Stanton said reflectively. "People who talk as he does seldom mean what they say, even when they think they're sincere. I believe, with a fair chance, Jump will develop into a very decent fellow. Because I believe this, I am going to ask you to do personally all you can to help him along. Will you?"

Bunny nodded. "I'll try, Mr. Stanton. I'll do my best. Why, I guess I shouldn't even have to be asked to promise; it's part of our law to be friendly with everybody. Yes, I'll try hard, mighty hard."

"Very well, we'll call that point settled. Here's Mr. Henderson now, with Jump's satchels. The boy will spend the day with us fishing, and to-night I'll arrange to have him stay at Corby's boarding-house. His father will pay all the bills."

As Mr. Henderson joined them, the first wagon was already pulling out into the road. Whips were cracking. Muddy wheels turned groaningly. A man with a long stick was goading the elephant into action,

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crying loudly, "Mile up! Mile up, ol' girl!" Here and there, from the high seats, the performers were waving good-by to the Scouts. Mr. Henderson turned nervously.

"Jump!" he shouted. "Jump!"

There was no answer. The boy was not in sight. Wagon after wagon lurched across the ditch to the rough country road. Inside the cages, the disturbed animals roared their protests. But of Jump there was no trace.

Not until he had called again and again, and had even run ahead to search the nearer wagons, did Mr. Henderson give up his plan to leave Jump with the Black Eagle Patrol.

"I am sorry," he said, shaking hands finally with the Scout Master and the boys. "I am more sorry than you can know. He's probably stowed himself away somewhere. I—well, I am much obliged to you all for your friendliness. Perhaps, when we come this way again in the fall, I may be able to see you."

He climbed upon the last wagon. As it disappeared over the crest of the hill, he waved a hand to the little group of Scouts.

"You know," said Bunny, breaking a long silence, "I wish Jump had stayed; I really do."

"Same here," grunted Specs.

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CHAPTER IV

MAD DOG!

It was Nap who finally aroused the patrol from its dreams about the circus.

"Oh, Mr. Stanton," he said suddenly, "I almost forgot about the high school. What did you find out?"

The words recalled to every mind the enterprise they had jointly undertaken. Like a volley of snowballs against a fort, the boys bombarded the Scout Master with eager questions.

"What did he say?"

"Is the mayor going to help us?"

"Will there be a high school?"

"Are they going to start building it right away?"

"How about the gymnasium?"

"Will there be a manual training department?"

"And an athletic field?"

"And a regular football coach?"

Mr. Stanton raised his hands as if to ward off some of the flying questions. "Better sit down a bit," he suggested, "and let me tell you all there is to tell."

Very hurriedly and anxiously, the Black Eagle

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Patrol flung itself on the grass to hear the news. To boys reared in large cities, where high schools are common, the course may loom ahead as merely four years of distasteful drudgery. But the Scouts of Lakeville had reason to consider it in a different light.

There was no high school in Lakeville; there never had been. The nearest was at Harrison City, fifteen miles away and over bad roads. When a Lakeville boy completed the grades, he either went to work, or, if his parents were able to afford it, was sent away to continue his education. A few of the lucky ones, like the former patrol leaders, Buck Sawyer and Judge Lloyd, entered boarding-academies. Others lodged with relatives at near-by towns, such as Harrison City. But the great majority were through with all schooling when they graduated from the Lakeville grades.

Of the eight members of the Black Eagle Patrol, only one, Sandy Anvers, was absolutely certain of being sent away to school. S. S., who had finished the eighth grade that spring with Sandy, hoped to be entrusted to his grandfather at Harrison City, but was none too sure about it. Of the remaining six, who would learn all the Lakeville school had to offer in another year, only Bunny had better than a fighting chance of continuing his education.

So, first of all, the lack of a high school meant the certain breaking up of the patrol. "And, fighting

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furies!" as Nap put it, "what fun we could have in a Lakeville high school!" But there was something even more serious.

Handy explained it this way. "Four of us need to keep on going to school just as a matter of business. If we can't go at the right time, then we'll have to wait around a few years, and earn some money, and finally go at the wrong time. I want to be a civil engineer; S. S. wants to be a doctor; Bi's planning to teach physical culture; Bunny says he's going to be a forester. Every one of us, you see, must have a high school education before he can even start studying his profession. If we don't get it at Lakeville—well, you know what that means."

For this reason, the patrol now waited breathlessly for its Scout Master to speak. Somehow, he seemed less alert and hopeful than usual.

"Boys," he said slowly, looking them all over from Bunny, the leader, to Sandy, who was Number 8, "I'm afraid I have bad news for you. Last night I talked to Mayor Burbage for nearly four hours, from eight to almost twelve, and I believe he is right in his declaration that there won't be any high school built in Lakeville."

For three seconds, there was a dead silence; then Bunny spoke. "But why? Wouldn't he give you any reason? What has he got against a high school?"

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The Scout Master took off his hat and wiped his forehead wearily. "Yes, he has reasons. For instance, he argues that he managed to get along all right without ever going to high school and that he considers it a waste of money to build one."

"What did I tell you!" chuckled Specs.

"And he says that any boy who wishes to attend a high school may leave town and go to one where he can enter."

"I can't," growled Bi.

"Those aren't real arguments," said Bunny.

Mr. Stanton leaned forward. "No, they're not. But he did make one point that holds water. In order to build a high school, of course, it would be necessary to issue bonds, which would raise the tax rate. That puts the matter squarely up to the people of Lakeville. Well, Mayor Burbage claims that none of the taxpayers want a high school and that, unless he were convinced that the majority really did, he wouldn't make any move toward starting the agitation."

Bunny sprang up enthusiastically. "He's wrong. I'm sure he's wrong, and we can prove it. What's the matter with dividing up the patrol and finding out just what the people of Lakeville think about it?"

Mr. Stanton seemed amused. "You mean, take a house to house vote?"

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"Yes, sir, canvass the whole town. We'll ask every grown person in Lakeville if he doesn't want a high school. I don't believe we'll have to go very far, either, to prove they all do."

Bi chimed in an agreement. "That's the stuff. We'll start out and show old Burbage, in black and white, that pretty nearly everybody in Lakeville thinks as we do."

"And if he says there aren't enough fellows and girls to fill a high school," shouted Specs, "we can show him how it would draw from everywhere within ten miles. Why, they'd come from towns like Harvey and Burke, even."

Handy damped the enthusiasm a little by remarking drily that, unless they owned dirigibles or aeroplanes, pupils would be limited to about seven miles because of the bad roads.

But the patrol was in no mood to be discouraged. "We'll get them to fix up the roads," argued Bunny. "The farmers will be glad to do it when we have the high school. If Mr. Burbage won't help us to get a high school, the people who elected him will."

The pleasures of the day's outing presently turned the tide of the conversation. From all standpoints, the expedition was a success. True, S. S. fell into the lake and spoiled his clothes; and Sandy burned his back while swimming in the hot sun, but more than

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made up for that discomfort by discovering five new specimens for his butterfly collection; and Specs eventually shed the last remnant of his disappointment over not going to Shadow Island when, after an exciting struggle that lasted for fifteen minutes, he landed the only pickerel of the day. Altogether, the trip measured up to expectations.

On their way home, just after sunset, the talk turned to Jump Henderson. The final opinion of the youngest DeVallo was none too flattering. Specs seemed to sum up the general verdict.

"Thinking it over," he remarked, "I'm just as glad he wasn't left behind with us. The Scout law says you have to be friendly. That's all right. You could be friendly to a parrot if you saw him once a day. But if he perched on your shoulder, and squawked in your ear from morning till night, you'd soon be looking for somebody to steal him and never let you see him again."

There was no time lost in laying the plans to canvass Lakeville. Before the launch was moored at the buoy, the various streets had been parceled out among the eight; and next morning, armed with pencils and notebooks, the patrol sallied forth to find out exactly what Lakeville thought about a high school.

To Bunny had been assigned Oak Street. He was to follow it past Park and Greenwood avenues, and

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then straight into the country as far as Horace Hibbs' place. At half-past seven in the morning, he knocked at his first house.

Then came the painful awakening. To Bunny's surprise, he found that Mayor Burbage had been right. House after house he visited; he stopped men on the street; he interviewed the twelve laborers at Reddy's Mill. To each person he met, he put the case for the high school with all the warmth and enthusiasm and logic he could muster. Yet, when he checked up the results, he was appalled to discover that out of fifty-odd citizens, not one was heart and soul in favor. A few were timidly approving, but not enough so to stand forth boldly and proclaim themselves. The majority said "No!" in very certain terms. Reasons were plentiful. "It would raise the taxes." "It would not be worth while." "What's the use of a high school?" "Those who never attended one seem to get along all right." "Too much education is a bad thing for young people." "Nobody would come if it were built." "Why don't you wait till there's a demand for it?"

By the time Bunny reached the rundown farm, cultivated (now and then) by the erratic Horace Hibbs, he felt very discouraged, indeed. He had little hope of finding a friend and ally there, but, having been rebuffed so often already, he considered this final

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rejection of the plan would not greatly matter. He knocked vigorously.

In answer to his summons, Horace Hibbs came to the door, his gray hair ruffled, and his hands blotched with machine grease and acid stains. When Bunny had stated his errand, the man beckoned him inside.

"Come right in, Mr. Payton," he said, quite as though Bunny were grown up. "Walk into my little shop, and sit down and tell me about it. Of course, you can put me down as in favor of a high school. Best thing that could happen to Lakeville. Yes, right through the hall, Mr. Payton."

It was the old living room of the farmhouse in which Bunny found himself, but it had been transformed into a home workshop. Horace Hibbs was described in Lakeville as "a little queer," "a trifle peculiar," "a lazy good-for-nothing." But his words, his manner, and his very businesslike workshop suggested that these opinions were both unkind and untrue.

"Sit down on that bench," Mr. Hibbs invited, "and try these cherries. I don't waste much time farming, but I try to keep my trees in good condition. Here is what I am really interested in." He patted a chest on the table. "Some day I'll let you see inside. Why, Mr. Payton, if I could have had the chance to go to some high school when I was a boy, I wouldn't have

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wasted the best years of my life trying to be something I wasn't fitted for. The snow was coming thick on my head before I found out what I wanted to do. So here I am at fifty, trying to be an inventor, doing things with my thumbs instead of trained fingers, and not knowing as much about mechanics as a lot of youngsters no older than you."

It was part of Bunny's training as a Boy Scout to be closely observant of the people he met, in order to learn something of their characters. But now he was quite at a loss. Here was Horace Hibbs, classed by all the good people of Lakeville as worthless, as a man who had failed at everything, as a farmer letting the rich fields of the old Hibbs place go untilled, as a general "no-good." Yet Bunny told himself Horace Hibbs seemed far more energetic and wide-awake than the average citizen of the town. His shop was orderly; his cherry trees were in excellent condition. Though the boy had no desire to read other people's correspondence, his eye caught the beginning of a typewritten sheet on the table, with the letterhead of "The Fair Play Factory," which began: "We agree you are on the right track. If you complete your improvements, you are in a fair way to turn the skate business upside down and inside out. Keep us informed—"

Why was it the business men of Lakeville had no

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use for Horace Hibbs? Bunny couldn't imagine. A moment later, however, Mr. Hibbs himself touched on this point.

"You don't have to tell me what the folks said when you told them you wanted Lakeville to build a high school. They were against it, weren't they? Of course! People in a dead town are always against any change. They pretend they're perfect because, down in their hearts, they know they haven't anything to be proud of. They try to think everybody should be just like they are—just as lazy and indifferent."

Mr. Hibbs took his pencil and began jotting down crosses on a bit of paper. "The town is dying, Mr. Payton. Anybody can see that. It is not as large as it was twenty years ago. Last week we had a local paper; Tuesday, publication day, it died. Lakeville wouldn't support it. Look at the empty stores. Look at the fizzle they made of the Fourth of July celebration last year. Where do the farmers do their buying? Not in Lakeville; not if they can help it. They even go to a smaller place, like Burke. Yes, Lakeville is a dead town. The people in it won't even help each other, to say nothing of helping anybody else."

"But why do you stay here?" Bunny objected.

Horace Hibbs crumpled up the square of paper with a laugh. "I'm like the fellow in the hospital with the broken leg: I'm here, and I can't get out. I've done

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my share of wandering; now I am going to stick till my invention is perfected. I believe it is good, but "—he added this a little bitterly—"but it's something I should have invented at fifteen instead of at fifty."

As Bunny turned back over the dusty road to Lakeville, he felt slightly encouraged. Here, at least, was a friend who would stick by the patrol and its ambition, No doubt, Horace Hibbs went too far in his distaste for the average Lakeville man; still, there was truth in his attitude. His comment had set Bunny thinking hard. Yes,—and it hurt to wring this concession from his heart,—there had been truth in what Jump Henderson had said, too, when he called Lakeville a "hick town." It did have some of the earmarks. Something had better be done about it.

Bunny cut through the Whiting farm to meet Specs. The latter, having completed his allotted list along the Wilbur road, was now jogging toward town with downcast chin. Before Bunny could speak, Specs told his story.

"Isn't it the limit! Nobody wants a high school. I met Mr. Albertson on the street, and he let me put his name down; but he was the only one. The whole scheme is—is hopeless."

Bunny frowned. "You think it won't go through?"

"I know it won't," snapped Specs. "I saw nearly

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as many people as you did, and each of us got just one flatfooted. That's a fair sample of what they believe. The town's no good. It's a hick town. That's all there is to it. And—" He stopped short. "What's all that yelling?"

The noise came nearer. "They're chasing something," Bunny decided. "It's coming down Greenwood Avenue."

The sound of a shot startled them. Before the echo had died away, pursuers and pursued flashed around the red house on the corner, making straight for the two boys.

"Specs! Specs! It—it's a mad dog!"

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CHAPTER V

THE GREAT IDEA

Mouth patched with foam, legs flopping, body wobbling unsteadily, the dog charged down the road. Behind it, shouting and waving clubs, raced Ernie Langer, Billy Reynolds, and a hanger-on of the Lakeville livery stable. Still farther in the rear, leading a second group of men and boys, pounded fat Mr. Pusey, proprietor of the Waldorf Inn.

"What are we going to do?" queried Specs a little nervously. "Try to stop the dog?"

Bunny glanced back over his shoulder. "Nobody along this road for a ways," he said quickly, "and they're bound to get him before long with that gun. We don't have to risk a bite from a mad dog, when there's no sense in it, even if we are Scouts."

Spent and weak, the dog still kept ahead of the chase.

"That's funny," grunted Specs. "A mad dog ought to leave a man a mile behind."

From a perch on the low stone fence, the boys watched the livery man raise his arm. There was a

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puff of smoke, the loud bang of a revolver, and a little spurt of dust to the right of the dog.

"Not much of a shot!" grunted Specs. "Bunny, those fellows must be great runners to keep up with that four-legged insect!"

The revolver banged again. By this time, the dog was within fifty yards of the boys and rapidly approaching a section of the road that spanned an old creek bed.

"Specs! It's Roundy's dog! It's Felix! He wasn't home last night at all, you know."

Specs' jaw dropped. "Why, that's right. He—"

There came another shot as the exhausted dog reached the middle of the low culvert. With a sudden yelp, Felix bounded to one side and whirled through the railing into the pebbled creek-bottom below.

"He shot him! Come on, Specs! Hurry!"

Sprinting at top speed, the two boys raced along the road to the bridge. But before they could reach it, the pursuers of Felix had plunged through the fringe of bushes at one side and were scrambling down the bank to the bed of the old water-course.

"If poor old Felix isn't dead already, he will be in a minute," panted Specs. "That fellow with the revolver is just aching to shoot something."

But no more shots came from the group that had gathered below the culvert. Instead, Bunny was

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surprised to hear a boy's voice raised in vigorous objection. He wondered where he had heard that voice before.

"No, you don't!" it insisted stubbornly. "The dog isn't mad, I tell you! I guess I know a mad dog when I see one! He isn't mad! I won't let you kill him! Keep away!"

The livery stable man objected. "We ain't goin' to let mad dogs run around here and give folks hydrophy. You clear out and lemme take a shot at him."

"I won't! No, sir, I won't! And you can't shoot him unless you shoot me first!"

With a start that was almost a shock, Bunny placed the voice at last. The boy below the bridge was the youngest of the Flying DeVallos.

Specs made the same discovery. "Jump!" he breathed. "It's Jump Henderson!"

The two Scouts peered cautiously over the edge of the little bridge at the group below. They were scarcely two feet above the bald head of the proprietor of the Waldorf Inn, but so absorbing was the fate of Felix that they crouched unseen. Ernie Langer, Billy Reynolds, and the others clumped on one side of the creek-bottom; eight feet away sat Jump Henderson, with his arm thrown protectingly about Felix's neck.

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There was no foam on the dog's mouth now. Felix seemed quiet, but was breathing hard. Apparently he had not been badly hit, although the hair on one leg was clotted with blood.

Mr. Pusey stepped in front of the livery stable lounger, who was swinging his revolver in eager little circles.

"Now, my boy," said the hotel man in his most soothing voice, "you don't want to get yourself into trouble, do you? Of course, you don't. Well, just move out of the way and let the dog be shot before he bites you."

Jump's teeth were set. "I'm not going to let you shoot a good dog like this one. He isn't really mad. Why, look here—see the cord where somebody's tied a tin can to his tail. He may have been running around all day with that. I know all about animals. The dog isn't any madder than you are, mister."

Without ceremony, the man from the livery stable pushed Mr. Pusey out of the way. "We've had about enough foolin'. Clear out, kid, while I shoot!"

Specs nudged Bunny; but the leader of the Black Eagle Patrol shook his head, while his lips formed the words, "Not yet."

Jump rose to his feet, with Felix in his arms. "I tell you again," he shrilled, "this isn't a mad dog. He's just been tortured. If you dare shoot—"

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"Come on, boys," ordered the man from the livery stable. "Make a rush. You hold the kid, and I'll finish the purp."

"Now!" whispered Bunny. At the signal, the two Scouts dropped between the attackers and the attacked. Their sudden appearance startled the dog-chasers for a moment, but it seemed to give Jump new courage.

"Don't you go back on me!" he pleaded hopefully.

"What do you think you're doing?" blustered the fellow with the revolver. "Is this any of your business? You kids keep out!"

Specs shouldered forward, grasping his staff belligerently. Bunny stopped him with a motion of his hand.

"Yes, this is our business," he told the men. "We know that dog; we know who owns him. Until we're sure he is mad, he isn't going to be shot, either!"

"Prove he isn't mad!" growled the livery stable man.

"Aw, tell him to prove it himself," whispered Jump. "You've got him bluffed; he's going sideways. Don't do anything he says."

But Bunny had his own ideas of the best way to smooth over the tangle. "Certainly," he conceded smilingly, "we'll prove it for you. Doctor McFall lives in that red house on the corner. He'll tell us. But we'd better wait a bit till the dog is breathing easier. That last bullet of yours grazed his leg."

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Waiting is not the most interesting task in the world. One by one, the group that had gathered to see Felix slaughtered grew tired and walked away, until finally there was nobody left except the boys and the man who had wanted to shoot the dog. He was plainly ill at ease; and when he had examined the piece of cord still twisted about Felix's tail, and when he had watched Felix submit patiently to the bandaging of the wounded leg and the washing of the hot mouth, he pocketed his revolver and, without a word, turned back toward Lakeville and the livery stable.

"You see," explained Jump, fixing his eyes on the departing man, "I came to Lakeville this morning on the six-o'clock train. Well, I walked out here to think things over, when, all of a sudden, the dog tumbled right down beside me. I know enough about animals to be sure he isn't mad, and—well, shucks, I hate to see any of 'em suffering, so—" He coughed apologetically.

"Going to stay here in town?" asked Specs. He wondered if the Scout law about kindness wouldn't appeal to Jump.

The other nodded in a shamefaced manner. "My father felt so bad because I didn't stay behind yesterday that I made up my mind to come. I've got a note he wrote to Mr. Stanton. I guess Mr. Stanton is to find me a boarding-house."

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Bunny smiled. After all, Jump had his good points. "I don't think you'll go to any boarding-house just yet. Felix is Roundy Magoon's dog, and he's been missing since yesterday. When Roundy and his folks hear how you saved Felix's life, they'll make you stay right there with them."

So it turned out. Mrs. Magoon absolutely refused to allow Jump to go to a boarding-house. She said she would look out for him herself for the present, and put him in the room once used by Roundy's grown-up brother. This made Jump's introduction to Lakeville a good deal pleasanter than it might have been under other conditions.

But the matter of taking him into the patrol's confidence and friendship was a far more difficult problem. The Scouts admired his kindness toward animals and his brave defense of the helpless Felix. They admitted, if they did not approve, his cleverness in hiding himself between two logs on Feather Point the day before, till the circus had moved on, and then rejoining it when it was too late to be sent back by his father. They conceded his courage in coming to Lakeville the next day, as an acknowledgment that he had not been fair with his father and as an expression of his desire to please him. Just the same, in spite of all these points in his favor, there remained a wall between Jump Henderson and the Black Eagle Patrol.

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For one thing, he had not lost the feeling that he was immensely superior to the eight. Their plans and hopes he considered utterly foolish. Though they did not expect him to help in their campaign for a high school, they did not find it exactly pleasant to hear it ridiculed as a "hick idea."

From time to time, also, as the days went on, he announced that the patrol had no "backbone." Lakeville fellows couldn't be expected to have any "nerve," according to him. There wasn't much anywhere outside of the circus. You couldn't count on nerve among a bunch of hicks.

In the beginning, such talk was merely annoying; but, after a solid week of it, Bunny began to feel that something should be done to curb Mr. Jump Henderson's prickling conversation. The opportunity came unexpectedly.

Browsing through the office of the defunct Lakeville *Journal* one day, in an effort to find some information among the exchanges for his cousin, he happened upon a most amazing paragraph. It was in the Colton *Star,* published some two hundred miles from Lakeville, and was part of an account of the performance given by the very circus that boasted the Flying DeVallos. The reporter had written:

"Unfortunately for the audience, the big thriiler of the show was omitted. This was to have been the

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climax of the act presented by the Flying DeVallos, in which the youngest member of the troupe, a mere boy, is advertised to make a long jump from the top of the tent to a flying trapeze. Last night, when the time came to do this so-called 'Leap for Life,' the boy apparently lost his nerve. He not only refused to jump, but burst into tears and had to be assisted from his lofty perch near the top of the ridgepole. Doctor O'Malley, at one time chief physician with the Robinson Shows, stated to the reporter that occasionally a circus performer loses his nerve in just this way. When it happens, he must quit work altogether until his nerve is restored."

Bunny could not help chuckling. So this was the way of things! Young Mr. DeVallo, such an expert critic of the nerve of the Black Eagle Patrol, was himself a coward. Of course, it would not be a kind thing to spread the news, and yet—Bunny chuckled again—yet, instead of destroying the paper, he tucked it away in his pocket.

Jump did not know, of course, that he was living in Lakeville over a volcano that might erupt at any moment. If he had, the chances are that he would have talked a great deal less than he did. But when a week slipped away without any hint that his breakdown was known to one of the boys, he began to breathe easier—and to talk more.

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The patrol still fought for the high school. On Wednesday night, a meeting was called to discuss plans and results. This was held outside the clubhouse, following a camp supper prepared over a bonfire, and Roundy, by special permission, brought Jump with him.

"Run your own meeting, boys," said Mr. Stanton as he sat before the fire. "The patrol leader is in charge."

Bunny rose to his feet and plunged into the heart of the subject.

"You fellows all know how much we wanted the high school. You all know, too, what happened when we tried to interest other people here in town. Outside our relatives, there were just about a dozen who agreed with us."

"Twelve too many!" sniffed Jump under his breath.

Bunny heard him, but paid no attention to the remark. "Well, it looks as if the high school is out of the question," he went on, "and we might as well forget about it. But there was one objection that lots of people made that set me thinking. They said, 'Oh, yes, you Boy Scouts pretend to be doing something for the community, but, all the time, you're acting selfishly. You want a high school for yourselves.' Maybe, now, they're partly right. Even if it would have helped the town as much as it would

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have helped us, I don't think we ever thought of it that way."

He paused to fit the fist of his right hand into the palm of his left. "But when they say we're selfish, they're wrong. We tried to do a good turn for Lakeville. You all know that. Well, let's admit there won't be any high school this fall. Sandy and S. S. won't be with us after September, I suppose. But we have a long summer ahead of us. Now, what's the matter with getting together and trying to do something for Lakeville? Let's prove we're unselfish. Let's wake up the town."

"If it was asleep, you might," remarked Jump in an audible whisper, "but it's dead."

Bunny continued steadily. "Suppose we all keep quiet for a minute or two and think of some plans. Each fellow ought to be able to suggest something we can do for Lakeville—something unselfish. In the end, maybe, we can start other folks thinking. By that time, I guess, it will be too late for them to help us build the high school, but it won't be too late for them to build it for somebody else. What do you say?"

Mr. Stanton nodded. From the others of the circle came a muttered approval. For a little time, the patrol scowled at the fire and tried to concentrate on the puzzle of helping Lakeville.

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"You're first, Bi," challenged Bunny at length.

Bi scratched his head. "How about advertising the town with signs?" he asked. "Put 'em on fences in the country and—and everywhere."

"How'll they read?" demanded Jump. "'Lakeville, the deadest town in the United States'?"

"Handy, you're next," called Bunny, ignoring this impertinent remark.

"Bi's idea suggested something to me. Suppose, on that grass plot across from the railroad station, we spell out 'Lakeville' in white stones?"

"First class!" conceded Mr. Stanton.

"People on trains wouldn't know whether it was the name of a town or a disease," commented Jump boldly, borrowing as his own a joke that was a favorite with the clown in the circus concert. Roundy laughed, although not enthusiastically.

"What's yours, S. S.?"

"We could distribute handbills among the farmers—'Do your trading at Lakeville.' It might get things started."

"That's all you fellows will ever have the nerve to do," Jump sneered, "just start something."

Nap suggested a parade in one of the small towns near at hand, a parade which would combine Bi's signs, in the forms of banners and transparencies, with the handbills advocated by S. S.

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"You don't think that people will come out to see a bunch of hicks parading, do you?" queried Jump.

These constant interruptions had irritated Bunny to a point where the Scout laws regarding courtesy and kindness were slipping from his mind. It seemed to him it would be not only a righteous but a most beneficial punishment to read to the patrol the account of Jump's breakdown at Colton. If he did, the late circus performer might lose a little of his insolence.

"Your turn, Roundy."

The fat boy shook his head. "I don't know. Couldn't we get some big convention to meet here?"

Jump rolled gleefully on the ground. "Get a convention to come to a hick town like this! Say, stop, or I'll die laughing."

"One more break like that," Bunny promised himself, "and I'll make Jump DeVallo laugh on the other side of his mouth." He spoke aloud. "You're next, Specs."

"Sandy and I thought of the same thing. Wouldn't it wake things up if we could interest the business men in getting a circus to show here each year? It would advertise Lakeville and prove that it wasn't such a dead town."

"Yes," sneered Jump, "but you couldn't get any circus to come here, because it is a dead town. And the Boy Scouts are the deadest part of it. There's

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just this difference: the rest of Lakeville know they're dead; you fellows don't."

It was the last straw. In a sudden flash of anger, Bunny pulled the newspaper from his pocket. He had completely lost his temper, and his only desire was to do something that would hurt the offending boy. Deliberately, while the others leaned forward, he opened the paper to the inside page containing the account of the circus performance. "Fellows," he called, "listen to—"

The sentence was never finished. Roundy's dog, Felix, came nosing his way into the group. Without wavering, he went straight to Jump Henderson and snuggled close against the boy's jacket.

Bunny drew his breath sharply. His anger vanished. He felt suddenly ashamed of the temptation to which he had nearly yielded. "I guess," he told himself, "a Scout can be as friendly as a dog, anyhow." With a quick flirt of his hand, he tossed the paper into the flames.

But the Colton *Star* had not yet ended its usefulness. As the fire kindled its corners, the sight of a headline sent Bunny sprawling and stabbing for the burning newspaper.

"What are you trying to do?" shouted Jump. "Make a torch of yourself?"

Bunny came to his feet again, the scorched paper

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in his hand. When he spoke, his voice trembled with excitement. "Fellows, I—I think I have a big idea. Listen! You've heard of the Fair Play Sporting Goods Factory?"

There was a chorus of assent. "Sure, the one that makes footballs and baseballs and that kind of stuff."

"And skates," added Specs, who was an ice enthusiast.

"I know still more about the Fair Play people," said Mr. Stanton. "A remarkable man named Gorse is the president. He takes pride in conducting a model establishment, pays living wages to every worker, provides decent conditions throughout his factory, and allows the employees to have a say about the manner in which it is run. It's 'Fair Play' in more than one sense. What about it, Bunny?"

"There's this about it, sir. Here's an interview with President Gorse, in which he announces that he is going to move his whole plant to this State. He will probably go to Elkana."

"But what's your idea?" demanded Specs impatiently.

"Don't you see? We've been talking about helping Lakeville, and here's the biggest thing in the world. Why, instead of allowing that Fair Play Factory to move to Elkana, we'll make it come here—here to Lakeville!"

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CHAPTER VI

A WRONG TOWN

So stunning and big was this scheme of Bunny's that its announcement left the patrol dumb. But this shocked silence was only temporary; in another moment, the Scouts were shouting their approval. Even Mr. Stanton nodded his head in vigorous assent.

"That's the best plan yet," he said, when he could make himself heard. "Any town would welcome the opportunity to be known as the home of the Fair Play Factory, and every other town would be forced to acknowledge its claim to greatness. By all means, boys, start the ball rolling."

"I don't exactly know how to go about it," Bunny confessed humbly. "You'll help us, won't you?"

"Of course," agreed the Scout Master. "Let me see. First, I suppose, we should select a site. I'll talk to Mr. Albertson about that. Next, we should write to Mr. Gorse and invite him or his representative to come to Lakeville and look over the town. Very well, I'll attend to that, too." He glanced at his watch. "What's more, I'll write the letter to-night, so it will

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go out on the 6:20 train in the morning. Now, if there isn't any more business before the patrol—"

There wasn't, of course. Anything further would have been as out of place as a parade after a circus performance. So Nap formally proposed that the meeting adjourn, S. S. seconded the motion, and the vote was unanimous. With a final cheer for Lakeville, for the Wide Awake Town that was to be, they covered the glowing embers of the camp fire with dirt and went home.

During the week that followed, they waited impatiently for the answer to the Scout Master's letter. Twice each day, after the mail was distributed, they bombarded him with the question, "Has it come?" till Mr. Stanton began to shy guiltily every time he glimpsed a Boy Scout uniform. But one fateful evening, upon his return from Dunkirk, where he had been trying a case in court, he found a long envelope in his post-office box.

Mr. Gorse thanked him for the invitation. He was glad, he wrote, that a patrol of Boy Scouts were behind the movement; he liked Boy Scouts, and it had been his experience that they were of great aid to any community. Several other towns had asked for the factory, the letter continued, and his agent, Mr. Patrick O'Flaherty, was now making a tour of the State, with instructions to report upon the natural and finan-

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cial advantages of each location. In due course of time, he might be expected in Lakeville.

"O'Flaherty!" repeated Bunny in an awed voice. "Why, he's the big athlete whose picture was in *Boys' Life,* isn't he?"

Mr. Stanton smiled. "Undoubtedly, this O'Flaherty is the noted hammer-thrower," he agreed. "It's not strange, however, that he should be working for Mr. Gorse. The Fair Play Factory makes sporting goods, you know."

Yes, Bunny had known. But until this moment, the fact had seemed of no particular importance. Now, with this evidence before him that O'Flaherty, *the* O'Flaherty, was Gorse's agent, his imagination jerked loose and galloped madly. If Lakeville won the factory, the Scouts would see him regularly; they might even shake hands with him or get him to teach them how to swing and toss the hammer. And that wasn't all. Other athletes, probably equally famous in their lines, might also be on the Gorse pay-roll.

"Cracky!" Bunny shouted. "Fellows, we've got to make that factory come here; simply got to."

But again, for a long period, there was nothing they could do save twiddle their thumbs and wait. "Twiddle their thumbs," of course, is hardly accurate. All outdoors was fragrant with the coming of summer, and summer, as any boy knows, is the time to

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fish and hike and race and play baseball and tennis. These the Black Eagle Patrol enjoyed in full measure.

When rain kept them inside, they practised on the trapezes and horizontal bars of the clubhouse and busied and tired themselves with games of every description. One wet, windy afternoon, indeed, they dug out their basket ball, which had been tucked away with the coming of warm weather, and began to shoot goals at one end of the big room.

Bunny easily proved the champion at this sport. Bi gave him a hard fight for the honor, but the patrol leader was steadier and more consistent. Poor Jump, who had never before known the feel of a basket ball in his hands, failed miserably in all his attempts.

"Wait!" he said sullenly, when they laughed at him. "You wait till I've had as much practice as you fellows have, and I'll show you. Say, can I take the ball home with me this afternoon? I want to try a few throws up the side of Roundy's barn."

"Open the hay-mow door," suggested Specs slyly, "and you'll have a fine basket hole. It's a good four by six feet, and maybe you'll net it—accidentally."

Jump scowled at this raillery. But a little later, when Bunny and Roundy started for home, he went with them, carrying the ball under one arm.

Coming around the corner of Oak Street into Main, the boys saw a stranger ahead of them. He was stand-

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ing in front of the hotel, with a sheaf of papers in his hand.

"Maybe that's *him*," said Jump, with equal contempt for grammar and probability.

The two Scouts knew whom he meant. Since the receipt of Gorse's letter, every unknown man in Lakeville had been subjected to rigid scrutiny, on the chance that he might be O'Flaherty.

"Too short," objected Bunny.

"Doesn't look any more like Pat"—they were calling him Pat by this time—"than I do," added Roundy.

As a matter of fact, this stranger was neither the size nor the build of the noted hammer-thrower. He was of medium height, with the ruddy face, the straight back, and the broad shoulders of an athlete. For this reason, idle curiosity slowed the three boys to a snail's pace.

"Whoever he is," observed Jump, squaring his back to a gust of wind that tore down the street, "he'd better hang on to his hat. Ah! What did I tell you?"

But it was one of the sheets of note paper in the man's hand, rather than his hat, that the tiny gale lifted high in the air. The hotel before which he stood acted as a wind barrier, and the suction caused the paper to fly straight up. For a second, it seemed the white scrap would escape the clutches of the waiting tree over which it hovered, and come safely to the

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ground; but just at the critical moment the wind died, dropping the paper, like an opened parachute, across a network of foliage. There it rested, twenty feet or more above the sidewalk, with no indication that it would blow free.

Bunny sprang forward. "We'll get it for you, sir," he called encouragingly, though without the slightest idea in the world how he might bring about that end.

The man studied him with shrewd eyes. "Thank you," he said quietly, and waited for the boy to fulfill his word. In some way, Bunny received the impression that he was being put to a test.

As he stared upward at the fluttering paper, the inspiration came.

"Here, Jump," he called, "let me have that ball."

Obedient for once in his life, Jump tossed it to him. With a calculating eye on the target, Bunny stepped back a few yards and prepared for the throw. For no reason that he could imagine, he felt suddenly nervous. The skill that had revealed him a star at the clubhouse seemed to have oozed quite away.

He poised the ball carefully, swinging it up and down to gauge its weight. This toss was to be much harder than for an ordinary basket. A freaky wind threatened, and the paper was smaller and higher than any goal he had ever attempted.

With a quick flirt of his arms, he shot the ball

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above him. Then, holding his breath, he watched it wing its curved path through the air—up, over, down: down, fair and true, into the very middle of the spread paper. The twigs bent. The paper flapped into his waiting hands.

As he gave it to the man, he saw the latter reach into his pocket. Bunny stopped him with a little gesture.

"I am a Boy Scout," he said, "and I am not allowed to take tips."

The man smiled. "I might have guessed from that throw that you were a Scout. My name is Gorse."

"Of the Fair Play Factory?" The awed voice was Roundy's.

"Precisely!" The word was like the spat of a rifle ball. "I am here to consider Lakeville's right to my factory."

"Where's Pat O'Flaherty?" demanded Jump, stepping forward aggressively. "You wrote that he was coming, and I wanted to see him."

"Hi! Ho!" said Mr. Gorse, fixing his eyes on the boy. "So you are disappointed in meeting me instead of Pat, are you? Well, he could not spare the time for this trip, young man."

Bunny was horrified at Jump's tactless remark. What would Mr. Gorse think of them? Much as he disliked to hurt Jump's feelings, he felt it was no more

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than fair to the Black Eagle Patrol to offer an explanation.

"He's not a Scout," he offered, pointing toward the luckless youth. "He—he just happens to be with us."

"Ah!" exclaimed the man. "Now I understand."

Bunny could not determine whether Mr. Gorse was amused or angry. He broke the embarrassing silence that followed by asking: "Have you seen Mr. Stanton?"

"Not yet. There is a sign on his door, 'Back in twenty minutes.' If he is, he will find me there. That's ample time for my talk with your mayor."

Here was another chance to serve. "I'll show you where the town hall is," said Bunny.

"Thank you," returned Mr. Gorse, with another of his quiet smiles.

"And—and do you mind, sir, if we Scouts meet you at Mr. Stanton's office after you've talked with Mayor Burbage?"

"Not at all. In fact, I'd like to meet all the fellows of the local troop. By all means, come."

It was Bunny who mumbled "Thank you" this time. And it was Bunny, too, who escorted Mr. Gorse to the town hall and up the creaking stairs to the mayor's office on the second floor. Here, after he had managed the introduction as best he could, he left the two together and raced back to the clubhouse with the

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news. By the time the Scout Master had returned from his errand, he found the entire patrol (to say nothing of Jump) waiting for him in the hall outside his office.

"He's come!" shouted Roundy.

"It's Mr. Gorse himself!" called Bunny.

"He isn't any bigger than you are, though," Jump said in an injured tone, quite as if he had expected the president of the Fair Play Factory to be fully eight feet tall and correspondingly broad.

Mr. Stanton unlocked his office door and herded them into the room. "How did you happen to meet Mr. Gorse?" he asked.

Roundy told of the good turn that had brought about the meeting. The Scout Master nodded as he listened to the story. Perhaps, after all, they might hope for the factory.

"If first impressions count," he said, "that should warm his heart toward Lakeville. But there are other matters—" He finished with a nervous shake of his head.

"I know what you mean," flashed Jump. "This old town's dead and buried. It's full of hicks. You can't fool that man."

"We shan't try to fool him," said Mr. Stanton severely. He walked over to the window for a view of Main Street. As far as he could see, not a person

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was abroad on that business thoroughfare. With a regretful sigh, he turned back.

Mr. Gorse was as good as his word. Before the twenty minutes were up, he walked briskly into the office. He smiled at the boys he had met, but his expression gave Bunny no inkling of his decision.

"I want to catch the 5:15 train," he said to Mr. Stanton, after he had shaken hands, "and that leaves me only a little time to talk. Your town—" He stopped, thrusting his hands deep into the side pockets of his coat. "Pshaw! I have no right to criticize another man's town."

"I wish you would," encouraged Mr. Stanton. "I think it would help us all. These boys of my patrol, you know, have set themselves the task of making Lakeville a bigger, better, busier place. What's wrong with it?"

Mr. Gorse considered. "These things primarily," he said at length: "It is ugly and unkempt in appearance. It is dead in a business sense. Its citizens are tolerantly content with present conditions. Its council is divided into two unfriendly groups, each pulling in an opposite direction. All those together make a pretty hard nut to crack, I'll admit, but I have confidence in you Boy Scouts. Now, about the Fair Play Factory—"

The Black Eagle Patrol waited in breathless antici-

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pation. Their hopes were fast waning, but they had not yet given up.

"I don't want to locate in a sleepy, unprogressive town," continued Mr. Gorse; "that's count one against Lakeville. I won't locate in a town torn by silly council bickerings; that's count two. I feel I am entitled to certain privileges, such as a free site, low taxes, a substantial bonus, and several minor grants, which Mayor Burbage says he is powerless to offer; that's count three. Upon these, I am sorry to say, must rest my decision. I am afraid I should not be justified in moving the Fair Play Factory to Lakeville."

"That is final?" asked Mr. Stanton slowly. Bunny could detect the hurt in his voice.

"Not necessarily," acknowledged Mr. Gorse. "Let me say this: The town that gets my factory must be a hustling, thriving, ambitious town; one in which I and my workmen shall be proud to live. It must be governed justly, without personal quarrels that are always threatening its welfare. It must be wide awake enough to work for its own interests. Lakeville is decidedly not that kind of a town. Make it such, and I shall be glad to consider its bid. Good afternoon, Mr. Stanton. Good afternoon, boys."

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CHAPTER VII

THE SIGN AT THE STATION

When the plans for securing the Fair Play Factory collapsed as miserably and as completely as had those for the building of a high school, the Black Eagle Patrol seemed to lose its enthusiasm. For a day or two, the Scouts carefully avoided any mention of the other ideas advanced at the camp-fire meeting. Mr Stanton waited anxiously. But, as it proved, he need not have doubted the stubborn courage of the patrol.

"Well, fellows," Bunny announced briskly one afternoon, "it's about time we were busy boosting Lakeville. Suppose we figure first on the chances of getting some circus to show here."

It was Jump Henderson who talked them out of this plan. "No use!" he observed with calm finality. "The best you could hope for would be to get a route agent to look over the burg. What would he see? Nothing but empty stores, deserted streets, and sleepy people—a hick town that isn't on the map. Forget it!"

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Jump was daily growing more unpopular among the Scouts, and they writhed under his stinging description of Lakeville, now bolstered by Mr. Gorse's verdict. But there was sound logic in his argument. Bunny nodded reluctantly.

"Maybe he's right, fellows," he conceded. "Anyhow, we can put that scheme one side for the present." He consulted a slip of paper in his hand. "How about distributing handbills among the farmers?"

S. S., who had suggested the dodgers, rose to his feet. "I've been looking up the cost," he confessed unhappily, "and it's a lot more than I ever supposed. We can't afford them."

"Signs?" Bunny looked at Bi.

"Easiest thing in the world," declared that athletic youth. "Mr. Simpson told me he would contribute a can of red paint. We'll hike into the country and spell them out on barns and fences and—and everywhere."

"How will they read?" sneered Jump. "'Sleepyville'?"

"Not a bit of it. I've thought of a crackerjack sign. Listen to this, everybody." Bi traced the letters on the clubhouse floor with his staff. "'Lakeville, the Wide Awake Town.'"

It sounded good. There was a snap and dash to

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the slogan that caught them all. Moreover, it was like a slap in the face to Jump Henderson's taunts that Lakeville was asleep or dead.

"Great!" beamed Bunny. "Bi, you deserve a medal for that. Now, what's next? How about the idea of getting conventions to meet here, Roundy?"

The fat boy wriggled a little uncomfortably. "Well, I haven't had time to work out the details," he admitted, "but I don't see any reason why it won't go."

"Bound to," seconded Specs. "Call that settled. Next?"

"Parade," read Bunny.

Nap straightened up. "My idea is to paint a lot of banners," he explained, "and have each Scout carry one. Bi's sign would be bully. Others could read, 'Lakeville, the Coming Metrop'lis,' and 'Shop in Lakeville,' and 'Lakeville, the Best Town in America,' and—and others like that." He paused to stare at Jump. "It would look fine, I think, if one of us led the parade on horseback."

There was no dissenting vote on the scheme. Even Jump, with visions of himself at the head of the patrol for once, had no fault to find.

"That's all," said Bunny, "except the white stone sign that Handy thought of building at the railroad station. And there won't be any trouble fixing that,

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of course. Fellows, we'll show Lakeville something yet."

But this enthusiasm was short-lived.

They began the campaign by hiking into the country with Mr. Simpson's gift of paint, prepared to advertise far and wide, only to discover that the farmers objected strenuously to having the amateur artists smear their buildings. A few permitted the boys to letter the signs on out-of-the-way fences, and an occasional rock offered a natural background. On the whole, however, the experiment was not a success. One can of paint proved far too little; the signs were mussy and not altogether legible; and as far as any definite result was concerned, they might as well have been adorning the north pole.

Mr. Green, one of the members of the council, laughed heartily at the thought of a convention in Lakeville. "Out of the question, boys," he stated decidedly. "Why, we haven't any chamber of commerce to take charge, or any hall big enough, or any hotels big enough for a crowd, or any newspaper. You're barking up too tall a tree, I'm afraid."

The parade was held in Dunkirk. It looked well. Riding proudly a borrowed horse, Jump led the eight Scouts, who followed afoot, each with a huge transparency bearing some complimentary message about Lakeville. But a few days later, when the Dunkirk

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Argus came to hand, the Black Eagle Patrol spelled out an account of their experiment that filled them with rage. They were ridiculed, laughed at, referred to as "a bunch of small kids off on a tear." The name, Wide Awake Town, was the butt of the reporter's sharpest shafts of humor.

This left only the project of the sign at the station. Perhaps the first steps were hardly tactful, but Handy was nothing if not practical. If the Scouts intended to plot the space just across the railroad track, and spell out "Lakeville" with white stones, it seemed to him that the proper way to go about it was to take measurements. So one afternoon, accompanied by Bunny, he appeared there with a yard-stick and a pad.

Peter Hinkle did not see them for some time. Peter was on the company's pay-roll as "station master," but his duties included those of ticket agent, baggage man, and telegraph operator, all rolled into one and rewarded with a single salary, which was small and which had never been raised. Much brooding over this wrong had grooved a perpendicular wrinkle from the top of his nose to the ridge of his hair.

After the train had come and gone, demanding its extra toll of work on his part, Peter stood wiping his hot face. It was at this moment that he discovered the boys across the track.

"Hey!" he called. "Get away from there!"

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The two Scouts obeyed the command by crossing to the platform. "How are you, Mr. Hinkle!" Bunny greeted politely. "We were just measuring that strip of land."

"What for?"

Bunny beamed. He felt like a Santa Claus about to bestow a gift. "Why, sir, we Boy Scouts have decided that it would be a fine idea to sod a plot over there and spell out 'Lakeville' with whitewashed stones. A lot of people would see it from the trains and—"

"Who gave you permission to tear up railroad property?" asked the station master.

Bunny choked back his rising anger. "We aren't going to tear it up," he corrected. "We're going to" —he struggled over the unfamiliar word—"we're going to beautify it."

"Oh, you are, are you?"

"Yes, sir. You see, it will advertise the town and—"

"No, it won't either!" snapped the man. "Because I am not going to let you fuss around with it. Think I want a reprimand from headquarters for allowing a bunch of kids to dig up the right of way? Think I am going to get out every day or so and mow the grass? I suppose you figure I don't do enough work now to earn my salary?"

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He glared at the bewildered Bunny till the wrinkle above his nose was a deep furrow.

"But—"

"But nothing. I won't have it. That's final, understand? And if I catch any of you kids over there again, I'll speak to the constable. Now, clear out and let me get back to work."

There was nothing to do but go. Bunny and Handy walked angrily away, holding themselves in by sheer will power. "We'll get even with him yet," Handy told his leader. "The old fossil!"

It hurt a good deal to confess this new defeat at the patrol meeting that night. "Hinkle's stubborn," Bunny completed his report, "and you couldn't budge him with a shot of dynamite."

"We might offer to keep the grass mowed for him," suggested S. S.

But they all knew this was not the nub of the trouble. The following morning, when Jump heard of the setback, he grinned. "Hinkle's a hick," he declared. "Everybody in this town needs waking up. Now, in a good circus like Campbell's—"

Sandy Anvers brooded over this last crushing failure till his nimble mind grasped a possible saving straw. He took Bunny one side and unfolded his plan.

"My dad owns part of the railroad," he explained; "stocks in it, or something like that. And he knows

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Mr. Harrison, who is a big-bug over in Elkana. Well, I'll ask him to see Mr. Harrison and find out if we can't go ahead as we meant to. You wait."

Exactly what happened during the next few days, the others in the patrol never knew. But on Friday of that week, Sandy marched triumphantly into the clubhouse with a letter. It was from Division Superintendent Harrison, and it gave the Boy Scouts of the Black Eagle Patrol official permission to develop the plot of land as they saw fit.

Jump curved his thumb and forefinger till the joined tips completed a circle. "Make old Hinkle jump through," was his advice.

"Won't we, though?" crowed Sandy.

Even Bunny grinned. "Let him call his old constable now!" he dared.

But on the way to the station, he was very silent. Just before the two boys reached the platform, he halted his companion.

"Look here, Sandy," he said, with a note of apology in his voice, "let me talk to him, will you?"

"Sure. But rub it in good; he deserves it."

Peter Hinkle was hoisting a trunk upon the truck. "Well, what do you want now?" he demanded.

Bunny cleared his throat. "Mr. Hinkle," he began, "I don't think you quite understood what we wanted to do the other day. We—"

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"Well, I did," grunted the station master. "You wanted to dig around on railroad land and make me a lot of extra work and bother, cleaning up after you and mowing the grass you planted."

"Oh, no, sir," said Bunny mildly. He stepped closer, smiling. "I was afraid I didn't make it quite clear. Probably, if I had explained that we boys would attend to all that, you wouldn't have objected at all. I'm to blame, Mr. Hinkle. When we took the matter up with Mr. Harrison, the division superintendent, we submitted a plan, which he approves. Here is what he says." He passed the letter to the station master.

Mr. Hinkle read it slowly. When he was through, he folded it and handed it back. "Humph!" he exclaimed. "Well, that takes the whole thing out of my hands, I suppose. Go ahead with your tomfoolery. But let me tell you—" Abruptly, his eyes narrowed, and his teeth clicked together. Without completing the sentence, he turned and walked away.

"Shucks!" said Sandy disgustedly. "Why didn't you rip open on him?"

"'A Scout,'" Bunny quoted, "'is courteous.' That's the reason. Besides, it was a kind of game. We won, and I hope we're good enough sportsmen not to brag and rub it in."

Sandy digested this thought. "Well, maybe you're

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right," he conceded doubtfully. "Just the same, I feel as if I'd missed something."

Back at the clubhouse, Jump was more outspoken. "You let him down too easy," he declared. "He thinks you're soft. Mark my words, the first chance he gets, he'll tear up that sign."

But if Peter Hinkle harbored any spirit of vengeance, he managed to hide it while the Scouts transformed the narrow strip of waste land into a green oasis. The very next morning, which was Saturday, they fell to with trowels and mattocks and spades, until the irregular ground was smoothed into a slanting bank or terrace. Under Bunny's careful guidance, the name of the town was traced in the form of shallow ditches, which on Monday were filled with even, round stones. After these had been whitewashed and fitted permanently into position, the Scouts cut squares of green turf from the lawn of their clubhouse and hauled them in a borrowed wheelbarrow to the station, where Handy and Bi joined the bits of sod and gently tamped them down. Around the entire plot, as a border, was a flower bed, planted with lily and narcissus bulbs.

When this bit of landscape gardening was completed, the Scouts were justly proud of the result. What the passengers on the two daily trains thought of it, of course, they had no way of determining; but

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they guessed Peter Hinkle's verdict. Bunny pictured him as scowling across the track, while hidden behind a window shade in his office, and mustering up courage to march over and tear up flowers and grass and sign. It was hardly a charitable view, but Peter had lined himself up very squarely as an enemy to beauty and progress.

For a week or more, in spite of the patrol's constant dread, nothing happened. Then, late one afternoon, Specs came racing into the clubhouse.

"Old Hinkle's over there," he burst out. They all understood where. "Saw him on his hands and knees doing something to the flowers."

With set, determined face, Bunny led the Scouts to the station. But nobody was in sight, and the plot appeared undisturbed. The leader of the patrol turned doubtfully to Specs.

"He was there," that boy said positively. "He must have seen me, though, and been scared off. Say, why don't you get young Anvers' father to write Mr. Harrison about his meddling?"

It was a strong temptation. Perhaps a curt warning from the division superintendent would show Peter Hinkle what to expect if he went too far. But Bunny shook his head.

"No," he said, "that wouldn't be quite fair unless we had some proof. But if I knew for sure—"

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It was Specs again who made the next discovery. Two mornings later, while Bunny was chopping wood for his aunt, the Scout appeared at the Sawyer back fence.

"He's done it," he announced. "The flower bed's all torn up. Come on."

They started for the station again. Sure enough, the border of the plot was badly damaged along the lower side.

Specs appeared elated. "There's evidence for you," he chortled. "And I saw him right at this spot the other day, too."

Good Scout that he was, Bunny dropped to his knees and studied the wreckage. If he found a footprint that matched Peter Hinkle's shoes, he would have the proof he wanted.

"Well?" demanded the impatient Specs. "Mr. Harrison will fix him good and plenty. I guess we'll have a new station master at Lakeville pretty soon."

Bunny stood up. The truth was disconcerting, but he told it. "Those are marks of horses' hoofs," he confessed.

"Then Hinkle chased them across the flower bed," flared Specs.

Bunny wanted to believe this explanation. Perhaps, if they went to Peter and accused him, the man might admit his guilt. After that, of course, they could take

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matters into their own hands. But he shook his head finally.

"No, it isn't fair to think that. Let's fix up the flower bed this time without saying anything to him. But if it happens again—" He closed his hands into balled fists.

It took them more than an hour to repair the damage. All this time, Peter Hinkle remained inside his office, and Bunny saw nothing of him until the following day, when the man stopped him on the street.

"Your name's Payton, isn't it?" he began. "Somebody told me you were captain of the Boy Scouts."

"Yes, I'm patrol leader."

It seemed hard for Peter Hinkle to speak. "What I wanted to tell you," he managed to say presently, "is that I am willing to take care of that plot opposite the station—keep the stones whitewashed, I mean, and the grass cut, and the flowers weeded and watered."

In spite of himself, Bunny's lips tightened. He wondered if this were some new trick to gain control of the sign. It would be simple enough, of course, to allow it to blacken in the weather and gradually be hidden by the lush weeds and grass.

"No, thank you," he declined coldly. "We Scouts agreed to 'tend it."

Peter Hinkle cleared his throat. When he spoke

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again, it was with a curious eagerness that suggested he was only a boy at heart.

"But I want to," he said; "yes, sir, I want to. I—I like flowers and pretty things." Now that he had made this amazing confession, the words came easier. "When you suggested putting the sign there, I didn't realize how attractive you were going to make it. I thought it would mean a lot of extra work for me. I was tired and discouraged and bitter. But when I saw that clean, white sign, with its cool, green backing of lawn, I began to feel ashamed of myself; and when the flowers came up and blossomed, I couldn't take my eyes off them. It rested me to look out my window and see what you'd done. Always before, there were weeds and cinders and refuse there. But now"—he coughed and looked away—"now it makes my work easier just to have that sign where I can see it every time I lift my eyes. Once or twice, I've sneaked across the track and puttered about there, straightening a narcissus or making a support for a lily. Yesterday morning I chased a stray horse away; I meant to fix up the flowers it trampled, but you boys came before I could find time. If—if you don't mind, I wish you'd let me take care of the sign."

For just a moment after Peter's voice died away, Bunny could not say a word. His throat felt choked with happiness, the way it did after he had won a

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race, or mastered a new stunt that had been baffling him, or made somebody glad with a good turn. He wanted Peter for a friend instead of an enemy; he wanted to believe in him; he discovered all at once how much it had been hurting to doubt him. For the first time, too, the sign seemed really worth while.

"You just bet we'll let you!" he shouted, swallowing the lump in his throat. "I'll put it to a vote at the next meeting." He felt like grabbing Peter's hand and wringing it as hard as he could, but he contented himself with grinning broadly. Peter understood and grinned back.

But that was not all. In the course of another week, quite without warning, the afternoon train rumbled in with a private car coupled to the last coach. Bunny and Handy, who had paused on their way to the clubhouse to help the station master with an extra big sample trunk, saw a trim, alert man step out upon the observation platform and look about him.

When his eyes encountered the sign, he actually nodded and smiled. There was no mistaking his approval, either, because both the Scouts and Peter Hinkle saw him bob his head and part his lips.

As nearly as the patrol could figure it out, there were two direct results of this study of the sign. First, Peter Hinkle was notified of an increase in his salary, "upon the recommendation of President Dry-

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den, in consideration of your loyal service and your pride in the appearance of the Lakeville station grounds." Second, a railroad photographer dropped off the train one day and took a picture of the sign. "Going to use it in the new time-tables," he explained.

Peter wanted to turn over his first month's increase in salary to the Boy Scouts, but they firmly declined the money.

"You see," Bunny told him patiently, "we fixed up the sign as a good turn for the town. Well, we are not allowed to take pay for good turns; that's part of our Scout law."

Peter nodded doubtfully. "But you boys don't get anything at all for the work you did."

"Don't we?" grinned Bunny. "We started out to make people know our town. When the new time-tables are printed and distributed to every station on the railroad, that picture will advertise Lakeville a lot better than anything else we could have done. Why, sir, we've been paid already—paid big. And if the sign and the grass and the flowers are always kept as pretty as they are now—"

"You leave that to me!" said Peter Hinkle.

And they did.

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CHAPTER VIII

OVERBILLED

"Can't be done!" exploded Handy.

"What can't?"

Catching his fellow Scout by the sleeve, Bunny halted him so sharply that Handy swung around on his heel.

Ahead, the road dipped into a tangle of trees and shrubbery, like a tunnel digging its way into the earth. Lakeville was still hidden by a screen of woods, while the thickening twilight blurred leaves, twigs, and hillside into a common background—or, as Handy called it, a blackground.

"Say the rest of it," urged Bunny. "Do you mean what everybody else is saying—that Lakeville can't be waked up?"

With a shake of his head, Handy laughed. "I wasn't thinking of Lakeville. I was just knocking a certain person for my own satisfaction, and I'd better quit." He looked back across the valley to the ribbon of road on the farther side. "Bunny!"

"What is it?"

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"Look over there! By those big elms! There he is! He's following us yet!"

As Bunny recognized the figure of the man who had been on their trail from the time they left Dunkirk, he tried to keep the excitement he felt out of his voice.

"There's only a mile to go. We've kept ahead of him so far, and I guess we can hold our own. Let's try the Scouts' pace again."

"He—he's after us," puffed Handy, as the two boys broke into a dog-trot. "You made a mistake when you said he must be some farmer. He—he's a highwayman. He knows we have that ten dollars in our pockets, and he's after it."

"Don't believe it."

"But look at him! He's running, too."

The boys freshened their gait into a steady double-time while Bunny pattered encouragement, quite as much to reassure himself as Handy.

"We can beat him at the running game. . . . Chances are, he isn't in good condition. . . . Just plug along. . . . Pretty soon we'll be out of the woods and—"

Stumbling on a broken branch, Handy fell heavily.

"Here! Catch hold of my arm!"

Handy refused. "I—I can't go any farther. It's my knee."

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As Bunny knelt to feel of the injured joint, the ring of running feet sounded behind them.

"There's nothing broken, Handy. Your kneecap is all right."

"No-o, but I—I can't keep on. Let's duck into the bushes and hide."

"That won't work." Bunny helped him to the edge of the road. "Your knee won't let us go fast enough. We'll stay right here. I don't believe he wants to rob us; if he does, you have your staff and I have mine."

Side by side, a little white but standing their ground, they waited the approach of the pursuer.

He came into sight suddenly, bursting around the bend at full speed and then, as he saw them, slackening to a halt. For a moment, he stared at the two Scouts, plainly unable to understand their attitude of defiance. Finally, to Bunny's great relief, he broke into a laugh so loud and hearty that it started echoes.

"What's the matter with you two kids? You didn't think I was tryin' to hurt you? You didn't think that, did you?"

"Why were you running after us?" demanded Bunny.

The man laughed again. His face was a jolly, healthy picture of good nature that would have knocked out anybody's suspicions.

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"Just because a farmer back there told me the quickest and surest way to get to Lakeville was to follow you two. You see, I'm a stranger in these parts, and I started to hoof it from Dunkirk about fifteen minutes after the pair of you got under way. I hollered at you a couple of times, but you wouldn't stop."

Handy looked shamefaced. "We—we didn't know," he said.

"No harm done. And I want to say right here that you two boys can go. When I started running back there, I said to myself, 'Jim,' I said, 'don't let those two kids lay it over an old professional like you.'"

"Are—are you a professional athlete?" Bunny ventured.

The man smiled as he buttoned his coat. "Try me and see."

Without a run, he leaped high into the air and, curling his legs, finished a complete forward somersault. After lighting like a cat, he bent backwards and executed a series of back handsprings, with arms and legs continuously striking the same spot on the ground.

"How's that?" he asked, brushing the dirt from his palms. "You know, I'm one of the Casting Cardellos, signed up with Mammouth's Circus this season. Jim Kelly is my name by rights. I'm dropping in at

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Lakeville to oblige an old friend, who has a son there —Jump Henderson. Maybe you know Jump?"

"Sure we know him." The boys spoke together.

"And we're going to see him to-night as soon as we reach town," added Bunny. "Come along with us."

Jim squinted at Handy's limping leg. "What's happened to you? Fall, huh? Well, you swing right onto my back and I'll carry you like you was a baby."

Both boys protested, Bunny offering to help and Handy insisting that he would be "all right in a minute." But Jim was not to be denied. With a heave of his strong arms, he derricked Handy to a pick-a-back straddle and started down the hill.

"I'm out of a job," he explained, as they jogged through the woods, "because my circus kerflummuxed. It went flat. Didn't take in enough at the door to buy hay for the elephant. So now it's laying up about five hundred miles from here, while old Bradley—he owns it—is trying to raise the money to carry it through the season. I'm on my way back home for a visit, but I got a day's stop-off at Dunkirk, so's I could come over to Lakeville and report on Jump to his father. How's he gettin' on, anyhow?"

"Pretty well," Bunny answered. "You know, he's in our crowd, the Boy Scout crowd."

"Ought to do him good," Jim commented. "That

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youngster needs to be with somebody his own age. Always did. Too much circus—that's what's the matter with Jump. When did he get to be a Boy Scout?"

"He isn't a regular Scout yet, but he takes the tenderfoot examinations to-night. That's the first stage. When he passes, he can wear a tenderfoot badge."

As Bunny said this, a peculiar expression flitted across Handy's face. But the boy on Jim's back offered no comment.

They covered the mile quickly, slowing down only at the last quarter, when Handy asserted that his knee was much better, and that he wanted to use his own legs. So the end of the trip was made at what Handy called a "one-legged lope."

In front of the Scout clubhouse, a camp fire was blazing, about which were grouped the Black Eagle Patrol, Scout Master Stanton, Mr. Albertson, who lately had been taking an active interest in the Scout movement, and Jump.

At the sight of Jim Kelly, the prospective tenderfoot whooped his delight. "Jim," he shouted, running up to the newcomer, "I'm going to be a tenderfoot to-night. Sure I am. All I have to do is to pass the exams, and I've got the stuff down so I know it all. Pretty soon I'll be a second-class Scout and then a first-class Scout. You watch. Why, it's easy; any-

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body who can do circus stunts can do these little hick things as easy as falling off a log."

The late member of the Casting Cardellos nodded pleasantly, patted the boy on the shoulder, and turned to be introduced to the group about the bonfire.

"Glad you're here," said Mr. Stanton heartily. "You can see Jump take the examination. If you wait over till to-morrow, you can be present when he is installed as a tenderfoot. You've been coaching him, haven't you, Roundy?"

"Yes, sir," said Roundy, somewhat embarrassed, "but I—I told him he ought to wait a week or two before he took the exams."

"Aw, rats! I can take 'em now," Jump interrupted. "I know enough to be a first-class Scout right now, but I'm willing to answer the tenderfoot questions first. Ask 'em, Mr. Stanton, and you'll see. I know 'em better than Roundy does."

Mr. Stanton motioned to Bi. "Let's have that lasso," he said, "while I try Jump on the necessary four knots he must know."

Bi stopped his "roping" to toss the lasso to Jump, who speedily worked the end into a bowline.

"There is the first knot, Mr. Albertson," explained the Scout Master approvingly.

Untying his work, Jump shortened the rope by means of the sheep-shank. After testing it to see that

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it held firm, Mr. Stanton scored the second knot. "Only two more," he said encouragingly.

Jim was watching with open approval. Mr. Albertson seemed mildly astonished. Roundy was frowning. Handy's face wore a look that was not a thousand miles away from a sneer.

"Give me another rope," commanded Jump.

Bunny found a piece in the clubhouse and passed it to the candidate, who accepted it without thanks.

"I'm going to tie a reef," he announced.

Mr. Stanton frowned upon the result. "This isn't right, Jump. You've tied a 'granny.'"

"It's not a granny," Jump flared back. "It's as good a reef knot as anybody'd want."

Mr. Stanton passed the rope to Jim, who shook his head. "I'm sailor enough to know that won't do. Untie it, Jump, and try again."

Furiously, the boy tore with his fingers at the blunder. But when he had freed the ends, he made no attempt to tie the reef or square knot again. Instead, he turned to the halter.

In losing his temper, however, Jump had upset himself completely. Not only once, but a full half dozen times, his attempt to tie the slip or running knot ended in such a tangle that luck, rather than skill, made it come right in the end. Even the simple timber hitch, which he chose next, baffled him for minutes.

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Scout Master Stanton considered. "Jump," he said finally, "I am not wholly satisfied with the manner in which you tied the four knots. Still, I must admit that you have passed this test. Now, if you and Mr. Albertson will come with me into the clubhouse, we shall have the rest of the examination in private, while the other Scouts enjoy the fire."

Nobody had to tell the patrol how to make the most of the wait. With one accord, all crowded around Jim and demanded a story; and Jim did not hold back.

He began with an account of his adventures in a circus that toured South America, switched to a yarn of a broken cage and an escaped leopard, and was in the middle of a ticklish incident with a "bad" elephant when the clubhouse door opened and the Scout Master, Mr. Albertson, and Jump came out into the firelight. Mr. Stanton was frowning; Jump looked miserably defiant.

"I suppose I can tell your dad you're a regular Scout tenderfoot now," said Jim jovially, scrambling to his feet.

"I am sorry," Mr. Stanton began, "but—"

"No, I'm not a tenderfoot," snapped Jump; "what's more, I'm not going to be a tenderfoot. I'm not going to be a Boy Scout at all. It's just a hick club, with nothing but hicks in it. And you can tell my father so, too."

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He glowered for a minute at the astonished group and then pelted off into the darkness.

Jim stared helplessly, an expression of blank amazement on his face. "What—what happened?"

"It's too bad," Mr. Stanton explained, "but Jump failed utterly. That's all there is to it. I took him away from the crowd so he wouldn't be flustered; he was losing his head out here. Inside, though, he was worse than ever. The Scout law has twelve articles; he could think of only seven. He mixed himself up about the history of the flag, and finally quit and refused to answer my questions at all. I am sure he must have become confused; certainly, he knew the answers."

"No, he didn't," volunteered Roundy. "That's why I told him to wait till he did know them."

Handy leaned nearer to Bunny. "You remember I said it couldn't be done."

With an exclamation of disgust, Jim slammed one heavy hand down on the other. "The trouble with Jump,—and I'm going to see him and tell him so,—the trouble with Jump is that he's been overbilled."

Mr. Stanton turned to the acrobat. "Overbilled? What do you mean?"

"It's a circus way of speaking, Mr. Stanton, and it's just what happened to Mammouth's Circus. It was overbilled. We had posters up everywhere, announc-

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ing us as the greatest show on earth, three rings and two platforms, a herd of elephants, the highest salaried artists in the business, and all that kind of stuff. It wasn't true. We were just a little one-ring outfit, with one 'bull,' a 'cat' or two, some monkeys, and maybe a dozen fair-to-middlin' performers. People wouldn't stand for it. They took a look at our tents and laughed at our claims. We were overbilled. That's the reason we failed. You can talk as big as you want to, but you can't fool all the people all the time."

"But how does that apply to Jump?"

"Mr. Stanton, he's overbilled, too. He always was, and he is yet. That's why his father wanted to get him with boys of his own age. He talked too much about who he was, and what he could do, and how much better he was than other folks. Jump overbilled himself."

"Then that wireless outfit in Dunkirk was overbilled, too," put in Handy suddenly.

"Didn't you buy it?" Nap and S. S. spoke together, as the attention shifted from Jump and his claims to the errand that had taken the two Scouts to Dunkirk.

"We certainly did not," said Bunny. "Handy and I agreed it wasn't worth the money."

"Overbilled," repeated Handy. "That's a mighty

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good word. If the fellow who was trying to sell the stuff had been telling the truth, the apparatus would have been a bargain at ten dollars. The tuning-coil was fair, but the spark-coil was broken, the wire was all in bad shape, and the whole thing hadn't been cared for at all. Overbilled!"

There was a lack of heartiness in the yells that ended the meeting. Of them all, Bunny alone seemed to have left any of the customary Scout cheerfulness. But when they had accompanied Jim to Roundy's home, where the acrobat expected to have a talk with Jump, the patrol leader turned enthusiastically to the Scout Master.

"Mr. Stanton!"

"Well?"

"All this business to-night is just what we needed to teach us something. I think I know it now. The reason we haven't been able to make people take any real interest in Lakeville is because we have been overbilling the town."

"How do you make that out?"

Bunny's voice was jubilant. "Don't you see? We've been trying to make everybody believe Lakeville is a wonderful place. We painted those signs in the country, carried the banners in our parade in Dunkirk, and did our level best to persuade people to come here. Well, we were wrong. That sign at the

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station helped, of course, but only because it actually improved the looks of the spot."

The Scout Master nodded.

"The truth is," Bunny rushed on, "Lakeville isn't a wonderful place at all; it's just a sleepy, satisfied old town, as Mr. Gorse told us. There's no use telling people it's good until it is good. We've got to quit overbilling it."

Mr. Stanton smiled at the patrol leader. "What are you going to do? Tear down the bills, as Jim would say?"

Bunny flushed. "Not on your life. We're going to start in to-morrow and try to make the town as good as we say it is. We're going to make it worth advertising. You can laugh if you want to, but that's just what we are going to do. And we won't stop, either, till we have Lakeville so good that it *can't* be overbilled!"

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CHAPTER IX

SPICK AND SPAN

But as Bunny discovered next morning, when he rounded up Specs to tell that independent Scout of the job awaiting the patrol, it is one thing to say you will make a town worth advertising, and it is quite another to follow up your words.

"Just what are we going to do?" demanded Specs.

Bunny was stumped. "Why—er—I don't know exactly. But we can do something. We can make Lakeville different, somehow."

"We could if we had a million dollars," retorted the discouraging Specs, "but there isn't any other way. I wouldn't let Jump know it, but I believe that kid has the town sized up about right. It is a hick place, and it'll never be anything else. As soon as I get old enough, I'm going to clear out. So's everybody else in the patrol."

"But—but we can do something," Bunny protested.

"You bet we can; we can do something right now—go swimming with the bunch. Here come Roundy and Bi."

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Ten minutes later, the Black Eagles had forgotten weightier problems in the usual race to be "first in." This honor, by the way, went to Nap, who clinched the victory by shedding his garments, one by one, as they covered the last hundred yards to the lake.

Splashing, diving, swimming, the eight boys wallowed in the clear water till Bi and Roundy, alert for mischief, seized S. S. and dragged him to the shore mudhole. There, while Bi held the victim, Roundy carefully painted Spick and Span with long stripes and circles of black.

"Now you're really dressed up," said Bi, scooting off into the safety of deep water, where Roundy joined him after a neat dive.

S. S. surveyed his decorations genially. "I wouldn't mind," he grinned, "if it didn't make me so much like this whole dirty town. I feel like Main Street after a rain."

To the surprise of the seven, Patrol Leader Bunny greeted the comment with a yell.

"Step on a rock?" asked Specs. "Or did a snapping-turtle bite you?"

"Worse than that—it's an idea. Listen, fellows; listen to this: I've thought of something we can do to make over Lakeville."

There was a chorus of "What?"

"We can clean it up."

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Specs groaned, and the groan was echoed by Sandy and Roundy.

"You mean, we can sweep the streets?" put in Nap.

"And pick up tin cans?" added Bi.

"And pull up weeds?" contributed S. S. "Why, even if we felt like it, and agreed to give all our time to the job, we couldn't make Lakeville clean."

"You listen to Bunny," said Handy. "The idea sounds good to me. Of course, we can't do it all by ourselves, but we might set the pace for others."

The patrol leader pulled himself up to the pier.

"Handy has the right idea. We can't do it all ourselves; we can do only a little. But lots of people in this town would like to see the place look neater, and if we start others working, nearly everybody ought to fall in line and help out. Once the clean-up gets going, we can do something else. See?"

Handy was the first outspoken supporter of the plan, but the balance of the patrol soon followed his lead.

"We could have a parade," Nap suggested, carried away by the glory of the idea; "a parade with signs."

"And Jump Henderson leading us on horseback," snorted Specs. "No, thank you. But it might be worth while to tack up signs around town."

"How about telephoning?" asked Handy. "The night before we tackle the job, we could call up all the numbers in town and ask people to turn out."

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Bunny nodded. "That's a corking idea."

"And we can talk with people before," contributed Bi, "and get them interested in the scheme."

"I own a little printing-press," Sandy said. "We can get out some printed slips announcing the day."

The swim ended in a general offering of plans for the cleaning up of Lakeville, and by night the Black Eagle Patrol had definitely set the date. A week from Saturday was picked for the occasion, the ten days intervening being considered ample time to notify Lakeville of what was to happen.

Those ten days proved busy ones. Roundy's barn was turned into a sign-shop, where, under Handy's direction, squares of cardboard, discarded pillow slips, old flour bags, and pieces of stout wrapping paper were transformed into announcements.

SATURDAY
IS
CLEAN-UP DAY

was a favorite, though there were plenty of others, such as,

HELP
TIDY UP
LAKEVILLE

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and,

IT'S
YOUR BUSINESS
TO KEEP
YOUR CITY
CLEAN

Meanwhile, a squad of the patrol made a house to house canvass, explaining the plans and meeting with an enthusiasm that spurred their flagging steps. Everybody seemed to be in favor of a cleaner Lakeville.

Sandy Anvers' printing-press was kept busy producing tags, arranged to string from coat lapels, with the pledge, "I WILL HELP CLEAN UP LAKEVILLE!" These were distributed as widely as possible, and great piles were left on the counters of the two largest business establishments, Green's General Store and Simpson's Grocery and Hardware Emporium.

Racks were fitted on hand-carts and wheelbarrows; sticks were pointed with sharpened wire, for the picking of waste paper from the streets and lots; hoes and spades were ground keen-edged; and Bi induced his father to donate the use of the family horse and wagon to carry litter to the dump.

"Of course," Bunny explained to Mr. Stanton,

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"we don't expect to do it all. We're going to start it; after it's started, the rest will have to fall in and keep it going. I think it will work."

"It's the right spirit," agreed the Scout Master encouragingly.

Friday night, in fifteen-minute relays, the Scouts kept the telephone wires humming steadily, and Saturday morning found them dressed for action and beginning their task. Jump had refused to help, but this was not unexpected because, since the tenderfoot examination and Jim's flying visit, he had avoided the patrol and spent most of his time fishing.

It was eight o'clock when they started down Main Street.

"Let's work fast," urged Bunny, "and show them we're in earnest."

Before a half hour dragged by, it became evident that they had taken their jobs too lightly. The clean-up proved hard, slow work, and even without being too thorough about it, they progressed only by inches.

"Look here," said Specs, as the town hall clock struck nine, "I didn't agree to clean up this whole place myself. Why don't the rest of those people give us a hand?"

"They will," answered Bunny; "anyhow, I think they will. Look how the Jennifers had their yard and

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street in front fixed up. We didn't have to do a thing there."

Resting on his hoe, Specs mopped his forehead. "There's only one Jennifer family in town. Where are all the other folks who said they would help? That's what I want to know."

To this, there was no answer. In dogged silence, the patrol stumped along at its task. The Scouts cut weeds, gathered papers, collected tin cans, straightened fence-posts, nailed sidewalk boards to the stringers, and, in general, did things which the town and the property owners should have done.

"We're all alone at it," reported Bi, as they gathered for a noon lunch. "Nobody else has turned a hand, except the Jennifers and Horace Hibbs, and that Wilson family over on Maple Street. You can't count Mr. Stanton, of course, because he's really one of us."

"That isn't the worst of it," grumbled Specs. "What makes me mad is the idea of working for them while they laugh at you. Look at old Green. When he passed, I could see him stick his tongue into his cheek, as if it was the funniest joke he ever saw."

"He's the only one," Bunny said.

"He's one of a lot," retorted Specs. "Old Simpson is just as bad. They're all doing it. Isn't that so, Handy?"

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"Well," admitted Handy, "they don't seem to take us seriously."

Bunny finished his sandwich before speaking. "Maybe I was wrong," he said slowly. "If I was—well, it's too bad and I'm sorry. But let's not be quitters. Let's stick it out till four o'clock. By that time, if nobody is with us, I suppose we'll have to own up we're licked."

Without argument, the patrol agreed; they had no desire to be classed as quitters. But though they worked faithfully, they worked alone. No volunteers joined them. The town looked on with languid interest, as though wondering why boys should be grubbing at such a task when there were green fields and a blue lake.

At a quarter to five, their work-tools put up, and the horse rubbed down, the eight stretched themselves wearily on the turf in front of the clubhouse. There Mr. Stanton found them.

"I'm proud of you," he said, plumping a hand down on Specs' shoulder. "You've done your share and more."

"Yes," admitted Specs with a groan, "we worked eight hours and cleaned up two blocks. The other 9,998 blocks are just the same as they were yesterday. If we did this every day for a hundred years, we might make a good job of it."

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Mr. Stanton smiled at the exaggeration. "You have set a good example."

"Nobody followed it." There was a disgruntled flavor about Bunny's voice. "I guess a good example doesn't mean anything except to the fellow who sets it."

"I've picked up so many scraps I feel like a chicken," said Specs. "Let's do something to forget it. Let's have some excitement."

The Scout Master weighed a package in his hand. "If you're not all tired out—" he began.

"Tired out nothing!" Bi jumped to his feet. "We're just tired of street-cleaning. If you know something interesting to do, let's try it."

Unwrapping the package, Mr. Stanton displayed a revolver. "I bought a box of blank cartridges at Simpson's, with the idea of having you practise a few racing starts. What do you say?"

There was no need to take a vote. The patrol tumbled over itself to dig toe-holes in the turf. Including the newest Scout, Sandy Anvers, all of them were acquainted with the crouching start used in dashes, and they fell into position like veterans.

"Now, Scouts, you know the system. At the command, 'On your marks!' you settle into place; when I say, 'Get set!' you lean forward ready to launch out; and when the gun cracks, away you go. If you start

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too soon, you will be penalized one yard. But you must learn to be off with the shot. I shall give the commands an equal time apart, so you won't be kept waiting. *On your marks!*"

The first trial sent Bunny into the lead, almost a yard in advance of the others, with Sandy and Roundy trailing. The second start brought Specs even with Bunny. The third saw the patrol leader beaten from the mark by Specs and Handy. On the fourth attempt, Bunny was away next to last, and when the pistol sounded again, he was beaten by all of them.

The Scout Master frowned. "Perhaps you had better rest for a while, Bunny. You are probably tired out. Usually, I know, you are the quickest of the crowd to get going, and now even Roundy is beating you."

With a shake of his head, Bunny refused. "I'm not any more tired than anybody else. I want to keep on trying."

In the eighth start, he left Bi a yard behind, though he was off an instant slower than the rest. Then, by ones and twos and threes, the other Scouts dropped back till, when the gun spoke for the twelfth time, Bunny left his crouching position with inches between him and Specs, his nearest rival.

Mr. Stanton threw up his hands. "I don't understand it," he confessed.

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It was Bi, a little embarrassed, who took it upon himself to explain. "It's this way, sir. You see, we are running with our backs to the sun, and your shadow falls ahead of us. Just before you fire, your right hand twists a little, so that a fellow can start before he hears the shot and make it look as though he was getting away on the flash. At first, all of us but Bunny took advantage of it. Anyhow, I know I did. Then—well, when I saw he wasn't doing the same thing, I grew ashamed of myself and quit watching the shadow."

"That's the answer," agreed Handy. "We all felt ashamed of ourselves."

Bunny grew red. "You—you make me feel as if I were setting up to be a goody-goody, and I'm not. I figured I could hold my own without 'beating the gun.' It was just a case of sportsmanship—"

Handy interrupted with a shout. "Fellows! That's the ticket! Why can't we show our sportsmanship with Lakeville? Why can't we make the town do just what Bunny made us do? It's vacation. We haven't anything else on hand but chores. Suppose, for a week steady, we spend two hours a day at this clean-up business? Why, before the time was over, a lot of folks would be shamed into helping us. Then maybe the whole town would help."

Mr. Stanton thought for a moment. "I am not

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going to advise you," he said. "But it might be worth trying. You had better vote on it."

Roundy's was the only dissenting voice, and when Bi offered him the job of running the wagon, he cast his vote with the majority.

Handy's guess was a shrewd one. Monday morning, when the boys appeared, there was a little scoffing and a few jeering comments.

"Who's paying you fellows for this? Santa Claus?"

"Didn't you get enough Saturday?"

"Why don't you go out and shovel a hole in the lake?"

But just before ten o'clock, Mr. Stanton brought the cheering news that the clerks in Green's store were busy removing a scrap-heap in the adjoining alley; also, that Mr. Albertson had become interested and was actively going out to spread the ambition.

On Tuesday afternoon, thanks to Mrs. Albertson, the woman's club endorsed the movement and began a campaign to help it along. At once, the four churches started to mow and tidy their lawns; the postmaster fell into line; Mr. Simpson, not to be outdone by the rival store, inaugurated a general clean-up of his property. All over the town, householders took up the good work with a vengeance. Even the little G. A. R. post of Lakeville, together with every other

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local organization, passed resolutions of approval. The jeers were now directed against the shirkers.

By midweek, not only had the idea been adopted on all sides, but there was a general questioning as to why it had not started long before. If Lakeville was not yet fully awake, at least it had opened its eyes and taken a good look at itself.

But it was Friday night that the crusade received its most substantial boost; for that evening the council met and unanimously voted to accept Mr. Albertson's offer to pay for all the equipment, hauling, and teamwork necessary, provided the town would assume the cost of hiring a regular street cleaner, a man who would devote his entire time to keeping the thoroughfares clear of weeds and litter.

"And that," said Bunny when he heard the glad news, "means that Lakeville is cleaned up now and will stay clean. I guess Mr. Gorse wouldn't call the town ugly and—and unkempt any more."

The patrol had won its first big battle.

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CHAPTER X

A SANE AND SATISFACTORY FOURTH

On Saturday afternoon, still flushed with the triumph of the victory, Bunny walked out for a talk with his good friend, Horace Hibbs. The inventor was raking the embers of a bonfire.

"This is a good ways from the public square," he smiled, "but it struck me I owed it to Lakeville to do my share of cleaning up, even if I didn't live across from the post-office." He led the way to a lawn seat. "Lucky for you boys that old Simpson wasn't in town last night."

"Why?" Bunny was puzzled. "He's just as much interested as anybody else. You ought to see what he's done to that lot by the side of his store."

Horace Hibbs chuckled. "Doesn't make any difference. If Simpson had been in town last night for the council meeting, that bill to hire a street cleaner would never have passed."

"Why not?"

"Oh, no particular reason, except that Green was in favor of it. And if Simpson had been present and

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spoken for it, Green and his followers would have voted against it. Simpson and Green: the Kilkenny cats! The pair of them spells one reason why Lakeville doesn't wake up."

Bunny dug his hands into his pockets. "You mean that they—they fight each other just for the fun of it?" He recalled Mr. Gorse's comment about the two unfriendly groups in the Lakeville council, each pulling in an opposite direction. So this was what he had meant.

"Something like that," commented Horace drily, in answer to his question. "You see, years and years ago, before you came, Simpson and Green were partners. They had one big store, and a mighty fine one. They were good friends, too, always paddling together, or fishing together, or tramping together. Then they rowed over some nonsense. Well, that started it. Simpson sold out and set up a store of his own. When Green was elected alderman, Simpson jumped into politics and managed to get himself elected to a similar position, for no other reason than this further chance to fight Green. Now, whenever one is for anything in the council meetings, the other is always against it."

Bunny studied the problem. "But a single vote isn't enough to beat a thing. I know that much from our voting in patrol meetings."

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Horace Hibbs laid a stubby finger on his left palm. "One vote won't do it, no; but the man back of that vote can—if he talks long enough and loud enough. You see, it's always easier to defeat a new idea than to put it through."

For a long moment, Bunny was silent; then he said slowly: "You see, Mr. Hibbs, this clean-up went through so well that we Scouts thought we might get up a Fourth of July celebration in Lakeville."

"Doesn't Dunkirk celebrate this Fourth?"

"They're talking about it, but it isn't settled yet. And if Lakeville should start now—"

Horace Hibbs smiled grimly. "Try it," he said. "If anybody can do it, you boys can. But you won't be able to accomplish anything without the political backing of both Green and Simpson, and I honestly believe they would rather fight than have the town celebrate the Fourth." Horace Hibbs stood up. "The worst of it is, Bunny, that if anybody could once get those two dunderheads to shake hands, they would be friends again."

The plan to celebrate the Fourth of July failed miserably. As Horace Hibbs had predicted, Green and Simpson assailed each other at the council meeting, till the proposal to have the town lead in promoting the celebration was killed and buried. First, Simpson was for it and Green against it; then, when the

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resolution had been amended, Green was for it and Simpson against it.

"The two old bumps-on-a-log!" snorted Specs indignantly, when the patrol gathered for its Tuesday morning swim. "Somebody ought to duck them good."

"My father told me," volunteered Sandy, thus bearing out Horace Hibbs' contention, "that they quarreled over nothing at all, and that if somebody could get them to shake hands, they'd probably be as chummy as they ever were again."

"How can you make them clinch when they don't even speak to each other, except in council meetings?" demanded Specs.

To this, there was no answer. Even Bunny lacked an "idea."

A strict State law, enacted during the last year, forbade the sale of cannon crackers and all other explosives, a cruel decree which compelled the Lakeville boys to hoard their nickels for other things. But the money thus preserved from going up in smoke was, for the most part, saved to spend in Dunkirk. For that progressive little village had finally decided to celebrate.

Early on the morning of July fourth, the excursion from Lakeville began to move toward the county seat of Dunkirk. The hikers left first; then the sur-

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reys got under way; and, last of all, the bicycles and automobiles.

The Black Eagle Patrol chose all three routes. Bi and Handy preferred to walk. Roundy and Jump drove with the former's mother and father. The balance of the Scouts crowded gaily into Mr. Sefton's big touring car; for the wealthy Elkana publisher who had shown so much interest in the patrol the year before was again visiting in Lakeville, accompanied by his daughter.

"I do hope you will win one of the swimming races," whispered Molly Sefton to Bunny, as the car purred over the country road.

Bunny laughed. "Not much chance, with Roundy to beat," he admitted ruefully. "Roundy's a regular fish in the water, you know. And then there's Jump—I wrote you about Jump."

"Oh, he's the boy from the circus. I do so want to meet him! Did he pass his tenderfoot examination?"

Bunny was obliged to be diplomatic in his answer, or would have been if Molly's attention had not been distracted by the sight of Bi and Handy, to whom she waved a greeting. On the whole, the patrol leader was just as well pleased.

The little town of Dunkirk had "done itself proud" in honor of the Fourth. The lake shore was decorated

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with festoons of bunting and strings of paper lanterns, while every last launch that rode at buoy was gay with red, white, and blue trimmings. In front of the courthouse, the city square boasted a big flag-draped stand, where, after the morning parade, Congressman Towley read the Declaration of Independence.

Dinner the Scouts devoured in various places. All of them had brought lunch baskets, and to supplement these, there were two eating tents that served a chicken dinner for a quarter. Roundy tackled one of these meals, and Jump went with him, because the sight of people eating in a tent "made him homesick."

Sharply at half-past two, the water carnival began. After a parade of brightly colored launches and rowboats, Mr. English, Commodore of the Dunkirk Yacht Club, fired the gun that started the first race, a half-mile event for paddling canoes.

In the boathouse set aside for contestants, Bunny and Handy were shifting into their bathing suits when the patrol leader abruptly stopped unlacing his shoes and tied them again.

"I'm going over to see Mr. English," he said.

"Why?"

"Going to ask him a favor, that's all. But maybe—" He ran out, leaving the sentence unfinished.

By the time he was back, with a very satisfied expression on his face, Handy was gone, to uphold the

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honor of Lakeville in the boys' tub race. From the glimpse Bunny managed to get of this struggle, it was a nip and tuck fight to the finish, but Handy won handily by his careful work, his delicate balance, and his refusal to take unnecessary chances.

A fifty-yard swimming event for boys went to a Dunkirk youngster. Roundy romped away with the hundred, however, with Jump second, and Bunny a close third.

"Maybe I'm some good," said Jump scornfully, climbing the pier ladder, "even if I'm not a sweet little tenderfoot."

An answer in kind was on the tip of Bunny's tongue, till it occurred to him that Jump's remark might not be entirely sincere, and that the boy was trying to conceal other feelings. Wisely, Bunny said nothing at all.

Ten minutes later he had his revenge in winning the boys' diving competition, with Jump a poor third. There was no apparent reason why the circus boy should not have scored the greatest number of points, for his early training certainly gave him an advantage. But he performed miserably, splashing where he should have dived cleanly and generally bungling his work in the water.

It was five o'clock, near the end of the program, and Bunny was standing within easy reach of Mr.

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Green, when the Commodore raised his megaphone for an announcement.

"Ladies and gentlemen," he boomed, "by special request, an extra event has been added to the aquatic sports. This is a rowboat race, one-eighth mile and return, for men over forty-five; two men to each boat. Dunkirk has one crew entered. Are there any two men from Lakeville to make up a second?"

In an instant, Bunny was beside the Lakeville merchant. "Mr. Green, you used to be an oarsman. Will you row in this race, if we can find you a partner?"

The man hesitated.

"It won't take long, and I think one of the Scouts will get somebody for the bow of the boat. You'll set the stroke, of course."

Slipping off his coat, Mr. Green jumped from his car. "I'll try," he agreed. "We mustn't let these Dunkirk fellows crow over us without making them fight for the right. Whom will you get for the other man?"

Without answering, Bunny led the way to the shore of the lake, where Specs stood at the stern of a beached boat, talking to a man in shirt-sleeves.

"Here you are," said Bunny. "Here's your partner."

The second man turned. As the two intended oars-

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men saw each other, their eyes and mouths popped wide at the same time. For Mr. Green was looking into the face of Mr. Simpson, and Mr. Simpson was looking into the face of Mr. Green.

"Who—who—" Mr. Simpson spluttered.

"Wha—what—" Mr. Green stammered.

"They're ready to start," interrupted Bunny. "They won't wait. If you two aren't on time, they'll say Lakeville forfeited."

The two men looked at each other sourly.

"The Dunkirk boat is launched," Bunny said. "You haven't a second to lose. Shall we help you push off?"

There followed a long moment of silent waiting; then, as though moved by the same impulse, the two men laid hands on the boat and slid it into the water. Green dropped into the stern seat, and Simpson into the bow. A little choppily, they dug their oars into the water and pulled off toward the starting-line.

Specs was awestruck. "It worked! Look at that! Give me credit for getting Simpson to the scratch. I had to talk till my throat was sore. But it won't turn out right, Bunny. They'll be fighting again before the race is over. You'll see."

Bunny was watching the start. "Maybe," he said, "and maybe not."

The crowd on shore hailed the gunshot with a cheer.

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Out in the lake, the two boats, battling desperately for the lead, swept their way for the buoys they were to circle.

"Those Dunkirk old boys know what to do with their oars," observed Specs critically. "They get a lot of power into their stroke."

"What's the matter with Green and Simpson?" shouted Bunny. "They used to row together, and it looks as if they hadn't forgotten how. Unless—"

Bunny bit his lips. Green, rowing stroke, had missed the water with his port oar, thus swinging the craft to one side.

"Watch Simpson!" exclaimed Specs. "He'll beef so loud you can hear him on shore."

But Simpson did not "beef." Not a word escaped him. As calmly as though nothing had happened, he continued his even stroke, pulling, if anything, harder than ever.

Bunny's heart beat easier.

Now dip and pull and recover, in perfect unison, the oars of the Lakeville pair shot their boat even with the Dunkirk craft—even for five or ten ticks of a watch, and then ahead, into a clean lead.

Specs let out a sudden yelp. "It's all off. There won't be any row out there in the middle of the lake."

Bunny's heart was high-jumping. As the Lakeville boat rounded the buoy, Simpson, by an unlucky

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move, suddenly knocked Green's starboard oar out of his hand and into the water. As they slewed about, the rival crew swept past, spun about the buoy, and bent to the last leg of the race.

"There'll be a fight right there and now," prophesied Specs, confidently, veering like a weathercock before a tricky breeze.

But there was not. There was not even the semblance of trouble. Simpson retrieved the fallen oar with his own and passed it to Green. Luckily enough, they had been on the point of coming about the buoy, and it was only a question of reaching to port, over the bubbling course they had just covered.

"They're talking to each other," said Specs. "I'll bet their words sizzle."

As a matter of fact, Simpson had offered the retrieved oar to Green with the words, "My fault, old man! But we'll win yet!" And the stroke of the Lakeville boat had muttered in reply, "No, it was my fault. Yes, we'll win! We'll show 'em!"

Now there was a real race. How the pair of them did row! The Dunkirk boat had a long lead, but that meant nothing to Green and Simpson. The oars bent under their muscles; the water swept back in angry whirlpools. Fifty yards from the finishing buoys, the boats were again on even terms; then, while Lakeville shouted itself hoarse, its defenders

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surged to the front and crossed the line to a decisive victory.

Specs had nothing to say. Bunny was too intent upon the success or failure of his plan for words.

As the two rowers beached their boat and climbed stiffly out, they stood for a moment looking at each other.

"Shake hands," whispered Specs. "Shake hands, you big gumps!"

The two old rivals did not hear him. Perhaps they would not have heard if he had shouted. Their minds were busy with other thoughts.

Simpson smiled suddenly, and Green smiled back. Simultaneously, their arms shot forward till their hands met.

"Jumping pickerel!" said Specs a minute later. "Why don't they let go? That's the longest handshake I ever saw in my life."

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CHAPTER XI

PAPER, SIR?

Dunkirk's celebration ended in a star-spangled blaze of glory. At least, so it seemed to Bunny as he watched the last "set piece" flame into a brilliant likeness of the American flag. But he was too elated to pass calm judgment upon this particular Fourth. The fact that all eyes could see Green and Simpson talking and laughing together, quite as if there had never been a difference of opinion between them, was proof enough to Bunny that the Black Eagle Patrol was fated to succeed in the gigantic task of creating a new Lakeville.

It was Mr. Sefton who threw the first cold water on his dreams.

"I have heard what you boys are trying to do with your town," he began on the return trip, as they spun along the moonlit road, "and it is a mighty fine undertaking. It will do you good to work at it. But I am afraid it won't accomplish any real result, because Lakeville is dead."

"Not dead," Bunny insisted. "Just asleep. When we wake it up—"

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Mr. Sefton shook his head. "When you do that, Bunny Payton, I'll believe you. I am a newspaper man, of course, but what I am going to say is not influenced by that fact. Last year, your *Journal* quit publication. Well, Bunny, I want to tell you frankly that the American town which won't support a newspaper has lost all hope of ever amounting to anything."

It was a new idea to the patrol leader, and he had no answer.

"But the Boy Scouts could start it again," Molly argued staunchly.

"If they can, I'll take off my hat to them," said Mr. Sefton. "Starting a newspaper and keeping it started is about as big a job as any man wants to undertake, let alone a handful of boys."

On the way home from the Weltons', Bunny questioned Specs, who had once spent his Saturdays working in the office of the Lakeville *Journal*. "Specs, why did the *Journal* fail?"

Specs considered. "I don't know. Old T. F. Cooley was its editor and owner. He's in town yet; lives on the corner of Maple and Grand. He does the Lakeville correspondence for the Dunkirk *Argus* and the Elkana *Herald*. You go and ask him. He's a good sort, but if you don't look out, he'll talk your arm off."

Which, of course, was an exaggeration, for the

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next morning, when Bunny discovered Mr. Cooley digging radishes in his garden, he met a very pleasant gentleman; and when the conversation ended, Bunny's arms were still fastened to his shoulders.

"Start the *Journal* going again?" repeated Mr. Cooley. "Why, I'd do it in a minute if I could."

"Why can't you?"

The editor jingled some coins suggestively. "Money! M-O-N-E-Y! A paper in this town can't make money. Before I was through, I had to mortgage the presses. Right now, they belong to a Chicago company, and they are just stored in the old office waiting to be sold."

Bunny was inquisitive. "But why can't a paper make money in Lakeville?"

"Not enough advertising," said Mr. Cooley promptly. "A newspaper must have advertising to live, and the merchants here won't advertise. Don't blame me. Look up Simpson and Green and the other fellows who have something to sell, and find out why they won't advertise. That's the secret."

Altogether, it was not what you might call an encouraging interview, but as Bunny hurried along to Simpson's store, he felt that at least he was getting nearer the root of the trouble. There was little of cheer, however, in anything Mr. Simpson had to say.

He greeted the patrol leader with a certain embar-

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rassment, which promptly vanished when Bunny explained his errand.

"Why didn't we advertise more with the *Journal?* Simply because we couldn't afford it. That's the long and short of it. A storekeeper must either get a return for the money he spends or go out of business. In this town, we put out our dollars for advertising and received nothing in return."

"But a newspaper," Bunny began weakly, and found himself floundering, "is—is—well, every live town ought to have a newspaper."

"Sure thing," agreed Mr. Simpson, "and nobody wants one worse than I do. But I have my living to make. The advertisements I ran in the *Journal* didn't do any good. I found I sold as much, or, rather, as little, without them as with them. That's why I stopped. If anybody can show me how to advertise without losing money, I'll be glad to try it again."

"But what's the matter?"

Spreading his hands in a gesture of discouragement, Mr. Simpson sank down on a dry-goods box. "Don't ask me. I don't know. Lakeville is dead; maybe I helped kill it, but it isn't all my fault. The farmers don't come here to buy any more. They go to Dunkirk, or to Harvey, or to Burke. Worse still, the Lakeville people not only don't care, but some of them go to those towns themselves when they have money

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to spend." He pointed a finger at Bunny. "The only live proposition in this town is your gang of Boy Scouts. You fellows get down and dig. Suppose you go over and talk to Green; talk to everybody; find out what's wrong. Then, after you've spotted the trouble and figured out a remedy, I'll help, and I guess Green and a lot more will do the same."

Late that afternoon, it was Handy whom Bunny chose to listen to his woe.

"I've talked to about everybody in town who sells things," he began, "and they all tell the same story. The farmers and the folks near Lakeville, who ought to buy here, don't. There's where everything began to go wrong."

"Lakeville stuff the same quality? Prices here too high?"

"No," Bunny said, "a lot of things here are cheaper. Now, it's up to the patrol to get to the bottom of this."

Handy plucked a spear of grass. "Look here, Bunny, aren't we getting all tangled up in this business?"

"What do you mean?"

Handy examined the bit of grass, threw it away, and pulled another. "We don't finish anything, and we don't accomplish anything. We started to get that high school. When we found it was out of the ques-

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tion, we tried for the factory. After that blew up, we tried to advertise the town. As soon as we discovered that didn't work, we planned the clean-up. And—"

"We put that through," interrupted Bunny.

"It's good for one year, anyhow," Handy admitted. "And now you want to start a newspaper, and you find you can't do it without advertising, and you can't get advertising unless you can bring people to town who'll buy enough to make it pay, and you can't bring people to town because the town is dead. Don't you understand, Bunny, we're exactly where we started, except for the sign at the station and a year of clean streets?"

There was a pause. Handy chewed his grass-stem and looked at Bunny, who said nothing but thought hard. When the patrol leader broke the silence, he spoke very slowly:

"Handy, you're partly right, but I think you're mostly wrong. If you figure things out, you'll see that we have done something; we've done quite a lot. And I'm not thinking of the station sign or the clean-up of Lakeville, either."

"What, then?"

Bunny halted, hands in his pockets and legs braced. "A two-year-old baby," he said, "can press a button and ring an electric bell. The power is there, and

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the apparatus is there; all he has to do is to press the button. Now, that's the way to look at Lakeville. The town is ready, the stores are ready, the buyers are ready; everything is ready, but nobody seems to know where the button is that will start things buzzing. If we Scouts can find it and press it—"

Handy chewed the grass-stem thoughtfully. "You may be right. But where is this button?"

Selecting a cushiony bit of lawn, Bunny seated himself. "That's for us to find out. You know as much about it as I do. People go to Dunkirk and to Harvey and to Burke because those places aren't dead asleep. Folks on farms who come into town to buy like to pick out a place that's hustling. They want a change from the farm. Now, what can we do to make it pleasanter for them in Lakeville?"

"How about the roads leading in?"

Bunny frowned. "They are as good as the roads to Dunkirk or Harvey or Burke. Besides, for the people we want to reach, Lakeville is nearer."

Handy thought again. "We might give the folks that come some sort of an entertainment, some kind of a show."

"Don't see how. But you're on the right track. Guess again."

Handy dropped on the grass beside him. "How about a free meal?"

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"Too expensive. Nobody to pay for it. But there's an idea: everybody that came might get a free ticket entitling him to a bag of peanuts or some popcorn or—"

"I've got it!" howled Handy, jumping to his feet. "A rest room!"

"A rest room?"

"You bet. Just the way the big city stores have rest rooms. The farmers come to town and bring their families with them. And here in Lakeville, up till now, the families haven't had any place to go. Suppose we could get that old Vanderlip building, for example, and fit it up with chairs and magazines to read and all that."

"The woman's club will help," put in Bunny. "Everybody in town will help. We can keep it clean ourselves. In winter, we can cut the wood for the stove and—"

"There would be a special room for children, with games," Handy went on, "and cold drinking water in summer, and fans and—"

Bunny capered in his excitement. "Handy, that's the button that will start everything going. I know we can get out one issue of the newspaper, anyhow; Green and Simpson will be glad to advertise for the day of the grand opening. We've found the button at last. Now watch things hum!"

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"Bunny," said Handy as the two shook hands solemnly, "it will go. I know it will go. We're going to wake up this town at last."

Yet even Handy had no idea how thoroughly the town would take up his rest room idea. The woman's club promised enough furniture to fill the Vanderlip down-stairs twice over. Books and magazines were pledged in abundance. Mr. Simpson agreed to provide lemonade for the opening day, and Mr. Green added a sufficient supply of cookies. To cap it all, a visiting niece of Mr. Albertson's, who was a trained kindergartner, offered to look after the small children and tell them stories.

At first, it seemed there might be some difficulty about getting the use of the Vanderlip building. Its owner did not live in Lakeville, and had the reputation, moreover, of being a man who "pinched every dollar till the eagle screamed."

Specs appointed himself a committee of one to argue the case with Mr. Vanderlip's local agent. "This rest room," he pointed out, "is just an experiment. If it proves a success, we'll make other arrangements. But right now, of course, you can't rent the store to anybody, so our use of it won't be any loss. And when people begin to flock to this town, it will be money in your pockets, because then your property will be that much more valuable."

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The agent said he thought it could be "fixed," and the Scouts breathed easier.

While the campaign for the rest room was going on, the work of starting the newspaper prospered equally. It was Mr. Sefton who made its reappearance an assured fact.

"We'll try it," he declared. "I'll stand good for the paper supply and enough 'boiler-plate' to fill the extra columns, and I'll arrange to rent the old *Journal* presses for this one issue. Mr. Cooley will be glad to set type, I am sure, because here is his chance of re-establishing himself in business. As for the advertising, you boys will have to attend to that."

Strangely enough, getting the advertising proved the easiest task of all. The merchants of Lakeville were not only willing to try out the Scouts' plan, but, headed by Green and Simpson, contracted for enough space to make Mr. Cooley's head swim.

"Good enough!" was Mr. Sefton's comment when he checked up their efforts. "Now finish the job. This isn't a good time of year to catch the farm trade, but I'll guarantee that you boys can do it."

On Monday the paper was issued and distributed free to every house in Lakeville and to all the farms and dwellings within a radius of five miles. In addition, large piles were scattered broadcast in Dunkirk, Harvey, Burke, and other neighboring towns.

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Naturally, the most prominent reading matter in the paper was the announcement of the opening of the rest room on the following Saturday; but, quite as interesting to buyers, were the advertisements of special sales for the same day.

"It's a dandy paper," said Specs, as he jumped from his wheel at the clubhouse after a long pump along country roads. "Everybody I handed a copy is interested. They don't understand what's happening to Lakeville, but they're coming in Saturday to find out for themselves."

"What do you know about this?" chuckled Handy. "The old Lakeville band is waking up, too. Pete Helmer told me they got together last night for the first time in two or three years; and Saturday afternoon they're going to give a concert in front of the post-office."

By Thursday, all was in readiness for the big day except the rest room itself. "Why doesn't Vanderlip's agent let us into the place?" asked S. S. "We'll have to work like troopers all day to-morrow to get it in order; even then, we may not have it looking right by Saturday. Here's Specs now. What did he say, Specs? Where's the key?"

Number 5 of the Black Eagle Patrol could not muster a smile. "He—old Vanderlip wrote his agent not to let us have the building unless—"

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"Unless what?"

"Unless we were willing to rent it for fifty dollars a month!" exploded Specs. "The old skinflint!"

"It's because he thinks he can get it out of Mr. Sefton," said Bi angrily.

"Fifty dollars!" repeated Bunny. "I don't believe there is that much money in the world."

Nap was shaking his head and speaking softly to nobody in particular.

"Waterloo!" he muttered. "Waterloo!"

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CHAPTER XII

ONE GOOD TURN—

It was raining a mild summer drizzle that evening as Bunny picked his dismal way to the patrol meeting at the clubhouse.

The outlook was as damp and dark as the skies. The invitation to come to Lakeville had been well received, and, in spite of the season, it was certain that a fair crowd would be on hand; yet the promised rest room seemed absolutely impossible. As a last resort, Bunny had appealed to Mr. Sefton, but that usually open-handed person had drawn the line at providing the necessary fifty dollars.

"I am not a Christmas tree," he had told the patrol leader candidly, "and I do not propose being taken for one. I want to help you boys as much as I can, but this man Vanderlip evidently thinks he can gouge me through you. I am bound to show him that he cannot."

To add to the gloom, Jump walked a block of the distance with Bunny and once more expressed his contempt for the whole Scout idea.

"It's all foolishness," he sneered. "Look at this 'good turn' business. What does it get you? Not

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a thing. You do good turns for people, and they think you are easy. So they jump in and do you a bad turn, because they think you don't know enough to take care of yourself."

Bunny tried to argue with Jump, but his heart was not in what he said. Wasn't Jump right, after all, or, at least, wasn't he partly right? Here the whole eight of them had been working with might and main to do a good turn for the town, a good turn that was about as unselfish as any good turn could be; and now, instead of pushing the work along, one of the persons to be benefited by the bigger, better, busier Lakeville was taking an unfair advantage of their position.

He felt sick of the whole affair. For a moment, he wished he were well out of it.

There was no cheer in the rest of the patrol, either. They gave the Scout yell without zest or snap, and slumped disconsolately in their chairs when Mr. Stanton rose to address them.

"I am going to speak to you," the Scout Master began, "about the rest room. You know better than I how you worked to make it possible; how the movement started; how new difficulties sprang up at every turn; how you were finally refused the use of the Vanderlip building without payment of rent."

"You bet we do," remarked Specs as Mr. Stanton paused.

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The man smiled. "Well, now that these points are clear in your minds, I want to tell you a little story. Let me start in the good old-fashioned way. Once upon a time, then, two Scouts were talking.

"'I wish,' said one of them, 'that I owned the store we want for a rest room, don't you?'

"'Don't I, though?' agreed the other. 'I'd like to do a good turn by giving it to the town. That would be a good turn worth while. Everybody would thank you. People would look up to you. They'd like you, and they'd go out of their way to do things for you. You'd get paid for a good turn like that.'

"'I didn't mean it that way,' the first boy objected. 'You don't do good turns for rewards. And I don't own any store building, of course, and I haven't money enough to rent that one; no boy has. But—well, I guess you and I and the other fellows ought to forget about Mr. Vanderlip and remember what all the other folks offered to do for us.'

"'I think,' said the second boy dispassionately, 'they were a little foolish to make those sacrifices, because now we can't ever start the rest room in payment. And I say that the only good turn is the one that gets you something.'

"'Every good turn gets you something, sooner or later,' his companion argued. 'Maybe not right away and not directly, but—'

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"'Prove it!' snapped the other. 'I don't believe it.'

"Then they both probably forgot all about the discussion, because they saw a man driving past. He was a man who didn't like boys; he didn't know them well enough, perhaps. Anyhow, he was about the last person in the world either of the Scouts wanted to help.

"And it happened just then that he needed help, too. A bolt had dropped from the shafts of his carriage, and, unless this was called to his attention, an accident would surely happen. The boy who wanted to get something definite for each good turn stood stock still. The other ran after the man and called his attention to the lost bolt.

"The man merely grunted, without even saying 'thank you.' He didn't offer any reward for the good deed; the boy had known he would not. But he repaired the damage and drove on.

"Just the same, the kindness began to warm the cockles of his heart. The sun seemed a little brighter, and the world cleaner and better. He felt different, somehow. And a little later, when he met a doctor with whom he had disagreed earlier in the day, he pulled up and told him that he had decided not to close the short-cut road across his farm, after all, as he had threatened to do, but that he would leave it

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open, for the doctor to drive over as often as he pleased.

"The doctor needed just that little encouragement. Things hadn't been going right with him that day, and he had begun to despair of human nature. But now he said, 'Why, down at heart, people are good, of course. What have I been thinking of?' And he touched up his horse and whistled all the way home.

"As he was unhitching, a young fellow of about twenty went tramping dejectedly past his house, casting furtive glances here and there. The doctor felt so elated over his discovery that the world was still good that he wanted to do something for somebody. So he called the lad into the yard and offered him a bench to rest on and some apples to eat.

"It wasn't much, of course, but it seemed a lot to the young fellow, who was out of work, and who was facing the first real crisis of life. That little kindness worked a miracle. Never mind what was in the boy's heart to do; he didn't do it. He had a long talk with the doctor, instead, and he borrowed enough money to take him to the city, away from the temptation that had been gnawing at his heart.

"Better yet, his whole nature seemed changed. He was glad he was alive, and he knew he could make good where he was going. He hummed a little tune as he walked to the station, head up and chest out.

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"On the train, he found a seat next to a prosperous business man who had been brought up in that section of the country. But this man's memories of the people there were unpleasant, and he told the young fellow he couldn't remember a single good thing about the locality.

"'How about the apples?' grinned the boy, and gave him one of the doctor's to eat.

"The man said nothing. But he munched the apple slowly. It was a good apple, sure enough, and it brought back recollections of other good apples he had eaten there years before, and of the people who had given them to him. As he ate it slowly and silently, his heart mellowed, till in the end he had changed all his views just by thinking of the good people and the good deeds and forgetting all about the other kind.

"He felt so pleased, so in tune with the world, that at the very next station he got out and telegraphed his agent to extend a certain mortgage he had left instructions to foreclose. Where that good turn eventually ended would make another story.

"As he was walking back to his coach from the telegraph station, he heard a dog whining and howling in the baggage car. He knew animals, and he loved them. Because he couldn't bear to think of one suffering, he asked to be allowed to see it.

"It seemed the dog wouldn't eat or drink. The

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baggage men didn't know what to do, and they were glad enough to have him examine the dog.

"Well, it turned out that the animal had a bit of sharp wire stuck in his mouth. The man worked with it till the train reached the next station, and by that time he had extracted the ugly prong from the dog's jaw. The dog wagged its tail by way of dumb appreciation, and the man patted its head and smiled himself, quite as if somebody had done something for him.

"Back in the train, he found its owner, who was naturally very grateful. He might even have offered a reward if the man had not explained.

"'You see,' he said, 'it was just a kindness I was passing along. Somebody did something for me, and I wanted to do something for somebody else.'

"This made the owner of the dog feel good, too. The men began to talk, and the one who had passed along the kindness told the other about this section of the country and particularly about this town. He told how the Boy Scouts were striving to make it bigger, better, and busier. Since he had boarded the train, you see, he had suddenly become proud of his home locality; it seemed to him now that everything was finer there than it was anywhere else—the people, the land, the spirit, and maybe the apples he had almost forgotten.

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" He mentioned the campaign for a rest room in Lakeville and Mr. Vanderlip's refusal of the use of his building without rent. If he could only afford it, he said, he'd put up the rent himself for a year or more

" The owner of the dog heard him out. He thought of a good turn he would like to do himself; thought of it, you see, because of the warm pulse of good cheer that was flowing through his veins. But he did not talk about what was in his mind.

" The next day, though, he caught a train for Lakeville. He wanted to be sure the other man's happiness had not misled him in his glowing statements about the good the Boy Scouts were doing. He talked to the business men about you. All of them seemed to have good turns to pass along. The farmer who had lost a bolt was not the least of these. The doctor offered to help. Everybody seemed willing to give of his time and money for the cause, and everybody said he was doing it without wanting any such rewards as even the mention of his name in connection with the project. In short, they were guaranteeing the rent of Mr. Vanderlip's store for one full year.

" Then, the man told me, he was sure of his ground. He knew all he wanted to know, and he revealed his identity. He was Mr. Vanderlip himself. He had come to Lakeville for the purpose, if the Scouts' in-

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tentions warranted the action, of offering his building, rent free, for as long a time as the rest room should be conducted."

It was Specs who came to his feet like a jumping-jack.

"Fellows," he shouted, "let's shake the shingles for Mr. Vanderlip!"

If the booming cheer did not actually shake the shingles of the clubhouse, it was only because the Scouts had nailed them so firmly in place that no explosion could move them.

Mr. Stanton held up his hand. "Just one word more," he begged. "Mr. Vanderlip asked me to say that the offer of his store building was really due to the boy who wanted to prove—and has proved—that good turns come home, like chickens, to roost. That boy, according to the farmer who lost a bolt, is our patrol leader."

Bunny squirmed in his seat. His cheeks got very red. He remembered his doubt about good turns that didn't seem exactly worth while. He looked with blurring eyes at Mr. Stanton, at the other Scouts, at the receipt for "good turn" rent of the Vanderlip building. Then his heart began to churn so madly with pure happiness that he couldn't have said a single word if somebody had offered him a million dollars.

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CHAPTER XIII

THE SECOND LAW

From the roof of Roundy's home, you could look squarely into a last year's bird's nest, plastered against a convenient crotch in the oak tree.

Stretched on the shingles near the dormer window of Roundy's bedroom, Bunny and Jump waited for the rotund Scout to come with the missing insulators. A homemade telephone line was under construction, planned to run across lots to Nap's. As yet, Nap had not appeared on the scene, but his arrival was due and past due.

Jump twisted his head restlessly. He was decidedly in bad humor. He had not expected to find himself in such close company with Bunny, and wished with all his heart there was some way of getting free without openly retreating.

Things had not gone well with Jump. Up to the time of the unlucky tenderfoot examination, his pride had kept him toeing the mark; that is, despite the reason which had induced his father to lodge him in Lakeville, Jump had managed to keep his self-respect.

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Also, without much difficulty, he had cherished the notion that he was of a good deal more importance than any of the Black Eagle Scouts.

But his failure to become a tenderfoot had changed his point of view. With his outspoken contempt for the patrol, an uncomfortable inner feeling had grown in strength; a gnawing suspicion that perhaps he was not quite as superior as his pride told him he was. This emotion was most unpleasant; so unpleasant, in fact, that he could not bear the thought of it for more than a few seconds at a time. As the days passed, it had developed into a waking nightmare, which he tried to drive away by an unguarded "knocking" of the Scouts and of the Scout idea.

The patrol's steady attempt to interest him in its work served simply to stir up his old shame. He could not down the feeling that to join them was to confess himself an inferior and a weakling. Now, before Bunny spoke, he guessed what the patrol leader was going to say, and he knew what he should answer.

"You know, Jump," Bunny began, "you ought to be a Scout, like the rest of us."

"What for? That's what I want to know. Why should I be a Scout?" He put all the contempt possible into his words.

"Well, for one thing, because you'd have a lot more fun, and because—well, because you owe it to your-

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self and everybody else to be loyal to the place where you are living."

"Loyal! What's that got to do with it? What's the use of being loyal?"

It was hard to put it into speech, but Bunny tried. "If you were with the circus, you'd be loyal to the circus, wouldn't you? You'd stick up for it? You'd do your best for it?"

"That's different."

"No, that's just the same. You're not with the circus, though; you're with us. Leaving out the fun side of it, you ought to be loyal to Lakeville, and the best way you can be that is by joining us and giving a hand to the things we start."

"Don't see it."

Bunny tried another tack. "Of course, if you don't want to come in with us, we don't want you. But here's another idea. You're a citizen of the country, just like the rest of us."

Jump yawned elaborately. With his rubber soles, he took a fresh hold on the shingles. "What's that got to do with it?"

"We are planning to give a flag to the town. Mr. Albertson has promised to put up a tall pole on that little mound near the railroad station, if we will provide the flag and see that it's raised every morning and taken down every night. We have five dollars in

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the patrol treasury, and we can get a whopper of a flag for ten; so we are going to earn the extra five by picking blackberries next week. The fellows decided last night that, if you wanted to help, your name would go in with ours, and you'd get some of the credit for presenting the flag to Lakeville." Bunny tried to be more convincing. "The blackberries won't take more than two or three days; we'll have a lark picking them; and this flag, you see, isn't just for us Scouts—it's for everybody. It's for the whole country. It—it's a mark of loyalty to—to Uncle Sam."

Jump yawned again. "I don't see why I should help. The country never did anything for me."

Bunny was unwilling to give up. "The country's done a lot for you. If it wasn't for all the people of the country working together, you wouldn't have roads; you wouldn't have post-offices; why, there wouldn't be anything like money. And," he finished triumphantly, "if you didn't have those, there wouldn't be such a thing as a circus."

With a jerk of his body, Jump turned himself slightly from the other. "That's what the hicks think," he said, "but I know better." His own words hurt him severely; he knew secretly that he was in the wrong, but he was too proud to admit the fact. "I've had about enough of this town, anyhow," he

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announced loftily. "First chance I get, I'm going to light out and join a circus."

"Suit yourself," grunted Bunny. Then, with a flare of foolish temper, he added, "It won't hurt my feelings any."

The answer irritated Jump. In his heart, he knew that what he wanted most was to be on good terms with the eight Scouts, and that when he pretended otherwise, it was merely to hide this hunger. Still, to admit this longing for companionship would be to confess that he had been wrong. This was impossible for Jump.

"I *am* going to suit myself," he snapped. "You'll see."

Happily, this moment brought Roundy, carrying the mislaid insulators, while Nap trudged into sight with a roll of wire.

"Couldn't help it," Nap explained. "Breakfast was late."

"Why didn't you go out in the yard and cook a Scout's meal?" demanded Roundy. "But never mind. You'll have to work that much harder to catch up."

Depositing the roll of wire at his feet, Nap sighted the top of the oak. "Do I have to climb that?" he asked.

"You bet you do," said Roundy.

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Nap sat down. "If you're going to wait till I climb that tree, you're going to wait a mighty long time."

"What!" exploded Roundy, as Bunny snickered. "Why, a baby in a cradle could shin up that tree."

"All right." Nap was unmoved. "Go ahead and climb it, Roundy. I'll sit here and watch you."

Roundy fumed as he laid down the insulators. "Bunny, you'll have to toss me this cord after I get up. I'll hitch the end of the wire to it, and then you can pull it over here. Nap, I suppose your highness will be kind enough to come up and help from this end, if I do the tree-climbing."

"I'll be there like Napoleon at Austerlitz," promised Nap, getting up and starting toward the house.

Three minutes later, Nap, Bunny, and Jump were together at the dormer window, watching Roundy in his laborious progress to the top branches.

"Be careful!" shouted Bunny suddenly. "That limb you're crawling on doesn't look safe."

"Rats!" Roundy grunted. "I've been all over this tree since I was old enough to walk. I know what's safe and what isn't." He gave a jerk to the coil of wire. "I guess this will be about the right place. Now, Bunny, you or Nap—"

The limb crackled. The sound blended into a splitting, wrenching grind, which climaxed with a sharp *smash.*

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As the branch collapsed, Roundy shot downward. A projecting stump of dead limb caught his head with an unpleasant thud. He bounced in toward the trunk and stopped short, saved from farther fall by the crotch which held the bird's nest.

"Roundy, are you hurt?" In his excitement, Nap was half-way out of the window.

Bunny held the boy back. "He's all right. Just a little stunned." The patrol leader's fists doubled and his voice dropped to a whisper. "He—he's slipping. ROUNDY!" he screamed. "Hang on! HANG ON!"

There was no sound from Roundy. Though he had fallen in such a way that his body lay almost evenly balanced, it was plain to see that the upper half, hanging down as it was, outweighed the hold and friction of the crotch. Steadily, a fraction of an inch at a time, the unconscious boy was slipping from his support. Unless something intervened, he was doomed to plunge headfirst through the foliage to the ground.

Jump poised unsteadily by the window sill. Of all the patrol, he felt that Roundy alone was his friend; and now that danger threatened Roundy, he had become not only willing, but anxious, to risk his neck to save him.

"I can leap to that nearest limb there," he blurted, "and—"

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"All right, do it! Now! Right off!" Bunny's words tumbled out in frightened gasps.

With his eyes, Jump measured the distance between the roof and the nearest hand-hold offered by the tree. It was no great stretch; he could do it easily. Then his eyes roved to the ground below, and he felt suddenly sick. The dread of falling oppressed him till, in self-defense, he leaned dizzily back to catch the window frame for support. The fear of leaping and missing made him shiver as though with cold. He wanted to be heroic, but he dared not.

"Wait!" he murmured feebly. "Wait!"

But it was no time for waiting. Each moment saw Roundy slipping faster and faster. As Jump stood trembling, Bunny stepped to the gutter-line.

"I— Let me!" Jump protested.

But even while he was speaking, Bunny spanned the gap in a flying dive, caught the nearest branch without mishap, and, hand over hand, worked his way down to Roundy.

Just in time, the patrol leader reached the falling Scout, and, by using his strength to the last ounce, dragged him back to the support of the crotch. Here he held him fast, rubbing his forehead and shaking him till Roundy's right leg wiggled a little and a tired voice piped up, "Huh? What? Wha'smatter? What happened?"

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Jump did not speak. He dared not look at Nap, who stood by the window as exhausted as if he himself had done the rescuing. Once Jump had made sure the danger was over and Roundy able to finish the descent in safety, he stole down-stairs and through the back yard to the alley, where, running at full speed, he made for the lake.

He did not return for dinner. Nobody saw him, in fact, till late that evening, when he slouched into the house like a criminal.

He felt that he had been guilty of something despicable by showing the white feather when Roundy was in danger. Whether or not Nap had heard his offer and noted his failure, he did not know; but he was only too certain that Bunny had both seen and heard. True, in the days that followed, neither Bunny nor any other member of the patrol ever spoke of the incident, but it weighed on Jump heavier and heavier. His cowardice seemed to have knocked away the last prop of his self-respect.

Life in a traveling circus had taught Jump the necessity of keeping neat and clean; in this respect, he had rivaled S. S. at first. Although he had become a little careless since his coming to Lakeville, his growing slovenliness became marked only after the tree adventure. He began to wear soiled clothes and to avoid bathing. In other ways, too, he let himself go.

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He quit tumbling and trapeze work; he kept away from all the eight, even from Roundy; and he became so slinking and solitary that Mr. Stanton grew worried. He even stopped telling himself that he was getting ready to "light out and join a circus." As matters stood, he knew he lacked the nerve to do such a thing.

When the Scouts went berrying, he had a hard five minutes when he wanted to join them; but in the end, because he could not bring himself to the humiliation of facing them all, he stole off to go fishing.

By a certain day in August, the flag had been earned and paid for, Mr. Albertson's gift of a pole was in place by the station, and a crowd of two or three hundred gathered to witness the official flag-raising.

It was on this morning that some impulse prompted Jump to steal a glimpse of the ceremony. He did not intend to come too close to the Scouts, but to hang around in the fringe of the crowd. He was scuffling up Main Street, with this object in view, when a quick glance revealed the Sefton automobile, with Molly in the front seat beside her father.

As spick and span as S. S. himself, Molly was; her hair brushed back in a glowing mass from her healthily tanned face and her pink and white dress crisp in its freshness.

In that instant, something happened to Jump. It

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was more like a slap in the face than anything else. He stopped, tingling with shame, as he remembered his own unwashed, sloppy person. He saw suddenly that he was not fit to speak to such a girl. He was an outcast; a dirty, cowardly, sniveling no-good.

He turned about, with a cloudy idea of running and running farther, till eventually he should be so far away that he could never come back to Lakeville. That was what he wanted to do.

But before he could set his legs in action, another plan came to him. He stood still, shutting his teeth tightly together.

"My name isn't Jump," he said bitterly. "It's 'Chump'! That's what I am. Anyway, that's what I've been. Just plain Chump. I'm sick of it, too, and I'm going to be something else."

He raced home to the Magoons', and in his room, having stripped off every stitch of clothes, gave himself, from toe to crown, a thorough soaping. Then, laying aside the things he had worn, he pulled out fresh underwear and stockings and his best suit. Next, he shined his shoes, brushed his tangled hair, and, tossing aside the frayed necktie, pocketed his last quarter to buy a new one.

It was a wholly different Jump who rushed up in time to see the tag-end of the flag-raising. He did not cringe at the edge of the crowd, but came boldly to

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the front. It was hard for him, but he made himself do it. There, after the flag had lifted to the breeze, Bunny introduced him to Molly, and at her request, Jump turned a back handspring and then a dozen forward and reverse "flips."

"It's wonderful," she told him enthusiastically, "just wonderful! You must be wonderful yourself to do such things."

A day ago, the compliment would have puffed him up; now, on the contrary, it merely showed him how his way of looking at himself had changed.

"I guess I'm not so wonderful," he said haltingly. "I—I know how to tumble a little, but I—I don't know much of anything else."

Which was only what everybody else knew; but in discovering it for himself, Jump had made a long step forward.

In the days that followed, he did not attempt to crowd his company upon the patrol, much as he wished he might be one of its lucky members. But he told himself stoutly he must earn his right to their friendship.

For that matter, the patrol had reached an unfortunate stage where it no longer was anxious to accept him as a comrade. Specs, indeed, was in favor of "cutting" him point-blank, even to the extent of not speaking to him. It seemed that Nap, as well as

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Bunny, had seen Jump's fluke when he might have saved Roundy, and Nap had told the others.

Yet before long, even Specs was forced to admit that Jump was growing into a very different person. "He's changing a little," said Specs grudgingly. "I've seen him studying Roundy's Scout Manual, and yesterday, when Roundy couldn't get away to hoist the flag, Jump went and did it for him."

Yes, Jump was changing, and more than a little. No longer fighting his secret desire to be a boy with other boys, his circus pride had gradually fallen into the right place. He wished frankly that he were a member of the Black Eagle Patrol. He rejoiced at the successes that had come to the patrol in the matter of waking up Lakeville. Better yet, he was beginning to feel that he, too, was a citizen of the great United States.

But the Scouts still regarded him as an outsider. If he cared to accompany them, paying his own way, there was no objection; but most of the minor hikes were planned and begun without his knowledge.

It was on one of these, in the latter part of August, that the Black Eagle Patrol swung jauntily back into Lakeville, after an afternoon in the woods, just in time to see a freight train rumble past the station. The engine was belching great clouds of sparks.

"St. Helena!" cried Nap in dismay. "Look there.

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Some of those embers will set fire to our flag as sure as shooting."

Before the words were out of his mouth, the line of black smoke and live sparks had swept the colors. The patrol started forward in a wild run. It was a hopeless attempt at rescue, but each separate Scout meant to do his best.

A trickle of white smoke curled from the flag.

"It's caught," panted Bunny. "Run your hardest, Specs."

But before either Specs or Bunny could reach the pole, they glimpsed a figure at the base, jerking frantically at the halyards.

The line must have tangled, for the flag refused to budge.

"It's Jump!" muttered Bi. "He can't— Say, he's shinning up that pole."

Jump it was. Agile as a monkey, he went wriggling to the top. Once within reach of the colors, he gathered the flag to him and snuffed out the smoldering fire with his jacket. As the patrol arrived, breathless but relieved, he untangled the ropes and slid slowly to the ground.

There was an embarrassing silence.

"You ought to get a vote of thanks from the town," Bunny said, finally, as Jump stood rubbing his sore palms.

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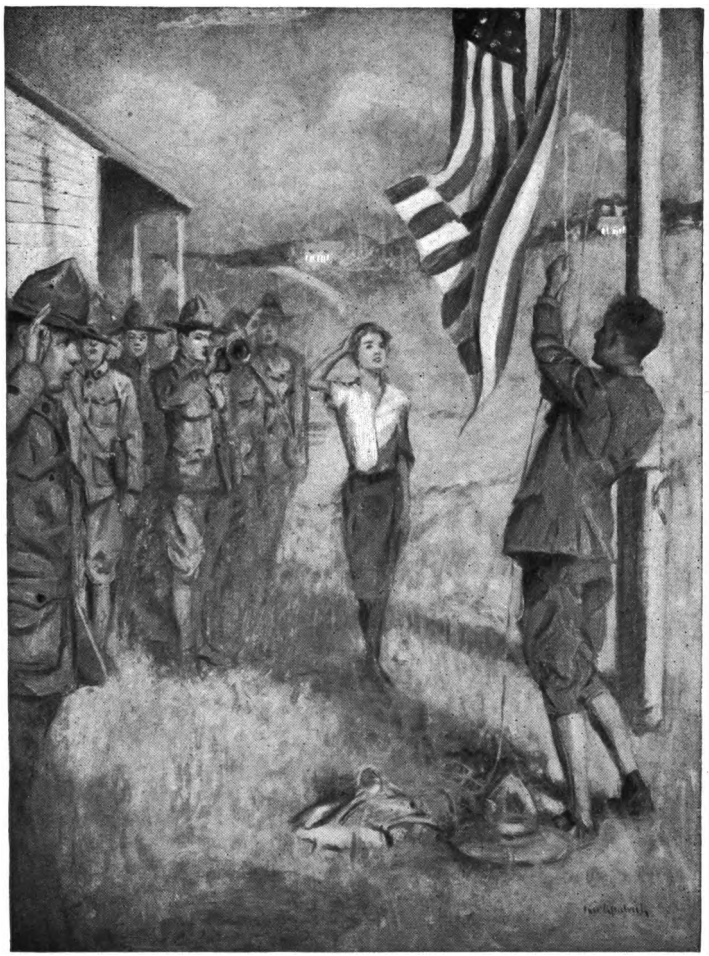

Jump, for the first time, raised his hand in awkward salute. *Page 171.*

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Jump looked away. "Aw, that wasn't anything to do. I just did that for fun."

But a little later, when the flag was lowered, the Scouts noticed that Jump stood facing it and, for the first time, raised his hand in awkward salute.

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CHAPTER XIV

NOT PATENTED

Mayor Burbage sighed his relief as some caller turned the knob of his office door. He wanted company; he wanted to talk to somebody, if for no other reason than to smother the irritation produced by the boastful article in the Dunkirk *Argus*. Even when he saw that the caller was Horace Hibbs, whom he did not know very well, he was still glad of the interruption.

After Mr. Hibbs had shaken hands, his blue eyes turned to the newspaper on the desk. The mayor had placed it there with an angry slap that spread it wide and revealed the headline across the front page.

"So Dunkirk expects to get the Fair Play Factory, does it?" asked Mr. Hibbs.

The scowl came back to Mayor Burbage's face. "Yes," he said shortly. "But I don't see why that fact gives the town any right to preen and cackle at our expense. Lakeville's just as good as it is, factory or no factory."

"H'm!" murmured the caller, smiling gently. "Perhaps neither is better or worse than the other;

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they are just different, that's all—which is what Napoleon said about nations, if I recall correctly a certain Boy Scout's quotation."

"Towns change," observed the official sagely. "I know Lakeville went to seed, but it's thriving now, thanks to those Scouts. Look over there at that new store Green and Simpson are putting up, now that they have decided to be partners again. Read our up-to-date newspaper. Watch our Saturday crowd of farmers, and listen to what they say about our clean streets, our band concerts, our rest room, and our busy stores. Notice how the council pulls together now, with every last alderman working for the good of the town."

"It's amazing," agreed the other man. "Gorse dropped in on me for a few minutes day before yesterday. He couldn't believe his eyes. Said Lakeville changed while you watched it, like a magician's red or blue or green handkerchief."

At the mention of Gorse, the mayor's eyes turned vindictively toward the paper on his desk. He heaved a deep sigh.

Horace Hibbs looked vaguely at the ceiling. "I was pretty sick last week," he ventured presently, apropos of nothing that had been said.

Mayor Burbage offered polite but perfunctory sympathy. He was a good deal more interested in the health of his town than in the health of one of its

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obscure citizens, particularly in view of that paragraph in the *Argus* story to the effect that Lakeville might have been a serious competitor for the factory, if the rival town had not been already pronounced dead by civic experts.

"Yes," went on Mr. Hibbs, "pretty sick. Return of a fever I contracted in the South several years ago. I was out in the rain the first of the week,—Tuesday, wasn't it, when this deluge we have been having signaled its approach?—and I got pretty well soaked. It was all I could do to stagger home and get into bed that afternoon. The next morning—" He shuddered involuntarily and fell silent.

"You were worse?" prompted the mayor.

"Much worse. My head ached. My throat was parched and dry. When I tried to get up, I found I was so weak I could not stand. And nobody came to the house. You see, I live almost half a mile from my nearest neighbor, off the main road, and there isn't much traffic past my place. Once or twice, people went along the street. I did my best to call for help, but they did not hear."

"You haven't a telephone?"

"No, I—well, the fact is, I am a little out of touch with the people of Lakeville; that is, I have been. Most of the time, I putter away in my workshop, and I haven't made many friends. You don't make

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friends, you know, unless you meet people half-way."

The other nodded.

"By afternoon that second day, I was too weak to get up for a drink. It really looked as if I might die before help came, and I began to grow bitter against a world that could be so selfish. Then, when I was on the point of giving up, I heard a knock.

"I couldn't answer. I tried to speak, to crawl to the door, to make some banging noise on the floor that would attract attention. But it was no use. I was too weak. I remember the pain it cost me to pick up a shoe that I meant to throw through the window, if I could muster the strength. Then—blackness—the blotting out of light and memory and hope. I presume I must have lapsed into unconsciousness."

Mayor Burbage leaned forward anxiously.

"After a bit," continued Horace Hibbs, "I woke up again. There was a boy standing over me, whom I recognized as young Payton; 'Bunny' Payton, they call him. He had come to my house once or twice before,—the first time, I remember, when his troop of Boy Scouts was canvassing the town for a high school."

He paused as the mayor winced. The failure of the plan to build a high school was another point scored against Lakeville by the paper the latter had been reading.

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Horace Hibbs took up the thread of his story again. "Well, Bunny managed to get me to the bed, and put a wet towel on my forehead, and give me a drink, and make me as comfortable as he could. He did it all in such a matter-of-course way that I was puzzled, because I had never turned over my hand for him. Later on, when he had called a doctor, and I was feeling better, I asked him about it." Hibbs smiled. "Do you know, he made me believe I had been helping him out. Said a Boy Scout must do a good turn each day, and I had simply offered him an opportunity.

"'But how did you happen to come in when I didn't answer your knock?' I asked.

"'Simple enough,' he shot back at me. 'I had been following your tracks down the path from town. I knew something must be wrong from the way your cane dug into the ground. The marks weren't in a straight line, for one thing, and the holes weren't clean-cut. You dragged it from one spot to the next, as if you were afraid you might fall, and once in a while, it showed an imprint out of step. People who are well don't leave tracks like that. When I reached your gate, the chickens ran up to me, and your cat began to *me-o-ow* and rub against my leg: I guessed they hadn't been fed lately. Then, as final evidence, there was a cobweb over the lower part of your door, and an open umbrella left to drain, though it hadn't

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rained for more than twenty-four hours. I knew something was wrong. After I'd knocked and waited a bit, I pushed open the door and came in.' "

"Wonderful!" exclaimed Mayor Burbage.

"Wasn't it? But it seems the Boy Scouts are taught to be observant. They learn to read tracks and signs, as the Indians did.— Well, I thanked him, of course, and supposed that ended the matter. But it didn't. That same night he brought one of the other Scouts with him, a youngster he called Specs,— Henry McGrew's boy,—and the two of them sat up with me. In the morning, they cooked breakfast; not a happy-go-lucky meal, mind you, but a real one, prepared and served fit for a king. They learn cooking in their order, too. By the time I had eaten a few bites, some more Scouts arrived, and Bunny and Specs went home to sleep. These new fellows made me chicken broth for lunch,—the best I ever tasted. And along about six that afternoon, the whole patrol dropped in for a chat, which did me more good than any of the medicine the doctor had given me."

"Did some of them stay with you that night, too?"

"They certainly did. That night, and the next, and the one after that. The third night I had a relapse, and I learned something else about scoutcraft. There were three of them at my house. One went to a neighbor's to telephone for the doctor, but reported

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that he was out on a call. He had taken a list of his patients, though, and after they had brought a fourth Scout to stay with me, those three went—went scouting for the doctor. Each took a list of possible places where they might find him, and they scurried from house to house till they did. Why, Burbage, there was more efficiency in their hunt than you find in the best-managed business firms. I tell you, sir, right there and then I began to get more than a glimmering of what boys learn when they become Scouts."

"It is a good organization," agreed the mayor. "Look over there at that new store Green and Simpson are—"

Horace Hibbs interrupted smilingly. "And what has the town done for them in return for their waking it up? They wanted a high school. The town refused it."

"That was last spring," said Mayor Burbage quickly. "Some day—"

"And they worked tooth and nail to get the Fair Play Factory to locate here."

"That failure was not their fault," argued the official, "or the town's, either. Gorse asked for a cash bonus; he was fully justified in doing so. But we could not raise the money."

"I know," nodded Horace Hibbs. "But I had never realized before just what the Boy Scouts were

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working for. It was to be a good turn for Lakeville. They wanted to make this a busy, bustling, thriving little city, not because to do so would benefit them in any way, but because it would benefit every citizen here. They believed the factory would prove the turning point. So do I; so do you. Their ambition—the one big ambition of the whole patrol—was to make Lakeville worthy of the name they had given it—Wide Awake Town. There wasn't the slightest suspicion of selfishness in their work; they just wanted to make a town that they and you and I and every man and woman and child here could be proud of. I tell you, sir, it isn't often you find any person or club showing loyalty to that extent."

The mayor rose to his feet. "Hibbs," he said earnestly, "they deserved to succeed in getting that factory. Dunkirk has not won it yet, of course, because bids may be sent till four o'clock to-morrow; but I've racked my mind all day trying to discover some way of raising the cash bonus. The other demands we can meet. If you have any plan—"

"I have," Horace Hibbs explained patiently. "I imagine the good people of Lakeville have looked upon me as a harmless old fool, puttering around there in my shop all these months. But I have been busy perfecting an invention, an improvement on the modern ice skate. This morning"—his face lighted up like

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a boy's—" this morning, following Gorse's visit the other day, I received an offer for my patent."

The mayor held out his hand. " Congratulations, Hibbs!"

" Thank you. The offer runs up into several thousand dollars, and—"

" Great! Man alive! the town will be proud of you."

"—and," continued the inventor, as if the other had not interrupted, " the Fair Play people say I may name the improved skate. What do you think of calling it the ' Wide Awake Town Speeder '?"

" But—"

" But nothing, Mayor Burbage," his caller reproved gently. " Don't you see what I am getting at? I want to name it after this town; I want to name it after the town this is going to be when the Fair Play Factory builds here—"

" What!"

When Horace Hibbs spoke again, it was very quietly, as if he were saying nothing extraordinary. " The money I shall receive for my invention will be ample for the cash bonus Mr. Gorse asks. I want to give it to Lakeville for that purpose. May I?"

" But why?" The mayor was clearly embarrassed. " Why should you?"

" I'll tell you, sir. First of all, I want to pass along

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the good turn the Boy Scouts did me. I don't know any better manner than giving this money. Second, I have been working hard on my invention, with the sole idea of getting money enough to leave Lakeville and fit up a real laboratory and workshop elsewhere. I recall telling Bunny Payton once that I was a good deal like the fellow in the hospital with a broken leg: I was here and I couldn't get away from here. But now—well, sir, now I want to go on living in Lakeville, in Wide Awake Town, if you please, because I want to keep in touch with the Boy Scouts I have come to know. I doubt if there are any finer fellows in the whole country. And the grown-ups and I are going to be friends after this, too, if my meeting them halfway—or three-quarters of the way, for that matter—will do it. Now, do you understand?"

"I—I am beginning to," nodded Mayor Burbage. And then he said, "Speaking of unselfishness and sacrifice—" and stopped with something very like a catch in his voice. He peered thoughtfully at Horace Hibbs. "You patented your invention?"

"Of course."

"And your plan of presenting the entire proceeds to the town—how about that?"

"Not patented," smiled the inventor. "Other citizens may infringe upon that as much as they like."

"They will have to, in a lesser degree," observed

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Mayor Burbage, shutting his lips tightly. "This cash bonus isn't everything. There are a score of other handicaps to overcome. We have only a few precious hours to secure our grants and options and make out our bid. I—"

"It isn't too late, is it?" asked Horace Hibbs nervously, rumpling his gray hair till it stood on end. "You can arrange the other details, can't you?"

"Hibbs," said Mayor Burbage solemnly, "if I fail now, with you and the Boy Scouts backing me up, I—I will resign in disgrace, that's what I'll do. Fail? no, siree! You tell those youngsters that the bid will be wired Gorse as soon after six to-morrow morning as we can persuade Peter Hinkle to sit down to his telegraph instrument. Tell 'em to come here and take the message over to the station themselves. You come, too."

Horace Hibbs rose to his feet. His lips were smiling, and there was a new sparkle in his blue eyes. But he nodded absently as the mayor bade him good-by.

"Now, don't worry," the latter assured him, fancying he caught a fleeting expression of doubt on his visitor's countenance. "Everything will come out all right."

"Yes, I know," said Horace Hibbs humbly. "I—The fact is, sir, I was just regretting with all my heart that I am too old to be a Boy Scout."

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CHAPTER XV

FIVE DOLLARS

When Sandy Anvers tore off the end of the envelope addressed to himself, and shook out the letter, an oblong of soft green paper fluttered to the floor. The letter, as he knew from the return address on the envelope, was from his Grandmother Anvers, who apparently understood boys better than any other woman in the world, except, of course, his own mother. But that she should send him a five-dollar bill, when it wasn't Christmas or his birthday or any other occasion on which presents might reasonably be expected, was almost beyond belief.

Even the letter did not help much to solve the mystery. Grandmother Anvers wrote simply that she hoped he would not spend the money foolishly, but that he was to do with it exactly as he liked. For one giddy minute, Sandy fought a wild impulse to rush down to Green's or Simpson's, where there were footballs and punching-bags and air rifles and such things for sale. Then the thrift he had mastered as a Boy

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Scout pulled him up short. Five-dollar bills didn't come in every mail.

But he simply had to tell somebody about the windfall. If Bunny had not arrived at this instant, Sandy would probably have burst outdoors and hailed the first person he met.

"Look!" he greeted Bunny, and held out the bill. "It's mine. Five dollars. My grandmother in Elkana gave it to me."

To Sandy's disappointment, the patrol leader displayed no interest whatever over the announcement. This was due, not to Bunny's inability to appreciate such a gift under ordinary circumstances, but to the fact that his own news was so dramatic as to make this other event commonplace.

"It's coming!" he shouted, without so much as looking at the bill Sandy had thrust into his hands for examination. "The Fair Play Factory is coming to Lakeville."

"Is it?" asked Sandy dully.

"You just bet it is!" exulted Bunny. "Or it will," he amended quickly, "when Mayor Burbage gets the town's bid ready to telegraph. And Horace Hibbs has sold his skate invention, and he is going to give the money—thousands and thousands of dollars—to get the factory here, and the mayor says it is the bulliest sacrifice he ever heard of, and the patrol is

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going to call on Horace to-night to thank him, and we are to meet at the mayor's office at six to-morrow morning, and—and—I guess that's all."

Sandy rescued his five-dollar bill. Very soberly, he put it in his pocket. After all, it didn't seem like much money compared to the thousands Horace Hibbs had given to secure the factory. But there was no use being glum about it; a Boy Scout must always be cheerful. So he managed a real smile.

"Say, that's great!" he exclaimed. "What time do we go to Horace Hibbs' house to-night?" The immensity of the sacrifice began to impress him. "Yes, sir, that's great!" he repeated.

Nor was any other Scout more happy and enthusiastic that evening at Horace Hibbs'. Just at first, when everybody, including the inventor himself, seemed a little ill at ease, Sandy brooded over the unkind fate that prevented his posing as a capitalist. But when Horace Hibbs served the lemonade and cake he had prepared for his guests, and showed them his new skate and explained the improvements, and talked and laughed with them quite as if he were fifteen instead of fifty, Sandy forgot all about the five-dollar bill, and asked eager questions oftener and louder than anybody else. He couldn't believe it was nine o'clock when the thoughtful Bunny suggested it was time to go home. Even when Horace Hibbs showed him his

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watch, and hinted that if the Scouts were to be at the town hall at six the next morning, they'd better get some sleep, he assented with a show of reluctance. It was the kind of an evening that a fellow wanted to go on forever.

After he had crawled into his own bed and resolutely closed his eyes, sleep did not come at once. Some days are too crowded for the nights that follow. But presently he was dreaming confusedly of a big factory in charge of Horace Hibbs, who was dropping skates into a giant hopper and smiling gently at the steady stream of five-dollar bills that poured from a chute at the bottom. The basket that caught them groaned under the weight, tipping farther and farther as it filled, till it tumbled over with a crash—and Sandy woke suddenly, to find the early morning sun shining into his bedroom window and an alarm clock on the bureau ringing shrilly.

Before the accommodating cook had prepared his breakfast, which he swallowed at an alarming rate, it was nearly six. He covered the few blocks to the town hall on a dead run, wondering if he would be late. He was not, as it proved; for although the seven other Scouts and Jump Henderson were sitting patiently on the front steps of the building, Mayor Burbage had not yet arrived.

"It's only Sandy," said the exasperating Jump,

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when Number 8 dashed around the corner. "We thought you were the mayor coming."

Before Sandy could think of a crushing retort, Mayor Burbage himself came walking briskly up the street. Bunny, as patrol leader, was the first to greet him.

"Good morning, sir!"

"Good morning, boys!" The mayor smiled, but it was such a tired, forlorn smile that Sandy involuntarily clenched his hands in sudden apprehension.

"Is—is everything all right?" he asked, stepping forward. Somehow or other, all of them had taken it for granted that the official would have no difficulty in completing his plans; yet the drooping shoulders and the blue-black patches under his eyes might easily spell failure. Till the other spoke, each Scout held his breath.

"Right as a trivet!" the mayor assured them. He unlocked the main door of the hall and led the boys up-stairs to his office, where they stood about awkwardly while he rolled back the cover of his desk and took out a long, bulky envelope from a pigeonhole. "Here is Lakeville's bid for the Fair Play Factory. Mr. Gorse has made public the terms of those already in his hands, and I am positive this is better than Dunkirk's, which is the best already submitted. But—"

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"But what?" demanded Specs, and then flushed a little as he realized his impertinence.

Mayor Burbage stifled a yawn. "I was just wondering," he said, "if you boys realize the work it cost me to put the town's official stamp of approval on this bid. There were people to be located and reached by telegraph and long-distance telephone; there were others here to be routed out of bed and convinced. Toward the end, I seemed to be the only person in Lakeville who hadn't turned in. You see, I had to make sure of our site for the factory. I had to be assured of the coöperation of the railroad. I had to have a legal opinion about some tax problems. I had to call a meeting of the council. I had to beg and demand favors right and left. I had to rush Mr. Hibbs over to Grand View to see a man; that's why he isn't here. I had—well, there were scores of errands and tasks you boys would not understand. And everything seemed to go wrong. I worked nearly all night, and—" He paused vaguely and blinked at his hearers. "What was I saying? Oh, yes, I worked till the roosters began to crow this morning, and I am too tired and sleepy to think. Just the same—"

Sandy yawned his sympathy. Specs opened his mouth again, but Bunny staved off the danger by asking, "You fixed up everything, didn't you? The bid is ready to telegraph?"

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"Ready, yes," the mayor agreed, "but not to telegraph. That was another stone wall I ran against. One of Mr. Gorse's conditions was that each bid should be made to him personally, and it took me an hour or more to find out where he was. Finally, though, I managed to get his private secretary on the long-distance 'phone. He explained that Mr. Gorse had left word he might be found in the North Woods, above Crockton, either at his hunting shack, a dozen miles from there, or at Gannon's Lodge, about halfway between the town and his place."

"But why should he leave his office before the day when bids could still come in?" asked Sandy.

Mayor Burbage forced a smile. "Mr. Gorse has no fear of public opinion," he said. "He is fair, but he is also shrewd. My guess is that he is making this a test. The town that hasn't the gumption to search him out in the wilderness isn't the kind of a town to which he will move his factory."

"And there's no telegraph office up there in the woods," nodded Bunny.

"And no mail delivery," added the mayor.

It was Sandy's voice that broke the horrified silence. "You—you haven't given up, have you, sir?"

"Not at all." Mayor Burbage shook himself, as if to put briskness into his speech. "Not at all. When I learned how matters stood, I had a talk with

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Ben Groat. He has hunted and trapped in the woods north of Crockton, you know, and says he can tramp the country blindfolded, although he has never been as far as Mr. Gorse's hunting shack. We traced the route on this county map. This is Crockton here, this is Gannon's, and this is Gorse's place. Well, Ben is to take the 6: 20 train to Crockton, and then hike from there afoot. The roads are impassable for teams or motor cars, owing to the heavy rains of the last week, but Ben says he can walk to Gorse's in about three hours by cutting straight through the woods."

The boys nodded. Sites and railroad coöperation and legal opinions were strange, confusing terms, but they understood maps and hikes.

The mayor leaned back in his chair, with eyes half closed. The Scouts shuffled nervously. None of them dared put the thought into words, but it seemed high time for Ben Groat to come, if he expected to catch the 6: 20 train. Sandy walked to the window, where he could watch the street.

The telephone bell jangled sharply. Mayor Burbage frowned as he roused himself to reach for the receiver. Was this some new complication?

"Hello! . . . Yes, this is the mayor speaking. . . . Oh, good morning, Mrs. Groat. I am waiting for Ben now. Has he— What?" In the brief silence that followed Sandy saw the blood redden the man's finger

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tips as he gripped the receiver. When he spoke again, it was in a series of jerky questions. "What's that? You say he's sick? Sick in bed? Too sick to get up at all? Then he can't carry the bid?" He paused to draw a shaking hand through his hair. "Oh, I—I am very sorry, Mrs. Groat. Yes, I shall try to get somebody else to take his place. Thank you for telephoning me. I— Good-by."

The receiver jammed noisily into place on the hook. A little desk clock pounded away the seconds with a maddening *tick-tick-tick*. The mayor cleared his throat.

"Ben's sick," he told the Scouts, quite as if they did not already know. "I hadn't thought of the possibility of his failing me. There isn't anybody else—"

The interruption was a faint, distant whistle. It came from the Cut, four miles south of town, where the down-train always signaled a warning for a dangerous cross-road. In another ten minutes, as they all knew, the engine would round the curve into view and grind to a stop at the Lakeville station.

Mayor Burbage fumbled the big envelope uncertainly. His weary eyes wandered to his hat on its accustomed nail. "Well," he said, sighing, "we mustn't give up now."

A sudden resolution pumped Sandy's heart. The idea was so big and daring that he hesitated to put it

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into words. And yet, why not? All summer long, the Scouts had been striving to aid Lakeville, to do it good turns that would result in something substantial. And here, at the eleventh hour, was the greatest opportunity of all. He stepped forward.

"If you please, sir—" He halted, embarrassed and afraid.

"Yes, yes, my boy?" Mayor Burbage's voice was a little tolerant and patronizing; it was as if he had said, "I haven't time to listen to any kid's conversation now." Even the balance of the patrol looked at Sandy in reproving amazement. Without stopping to realize that this was the very spur he needed, the boy threw back his head with sudden decision.

"Let Bunny carry the bid," he said stoutly. "He will see that it is delivered to Mr. Gorse by four o'clock this afternoon."

"Bunny?"

"He's our leader. I don't mean him alone. Let the Black Eagle Patrol carry it for you. We can do it."

None of the others spoke, but Sandy's sensitive ear caught the eager stir that marked the seconding of the proposal. It sounded like the rustle of dead leaves in the wind.

"But you are only"—the mayor had intended to say "kids," but he softened it a little—"you are only youngsters."

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Sandy turned to his patrol leader. But Bunny motioned him to go on.

"We are Boy Scouts," he reminded. "We know how to hike. We can find our way with the map and Bunny's compass, because we are trained to travel by map. And—"

The approaching train whistled again, much nearer this time. Mayor Burbage drew a deep breath and drummed nervously upon the desk with his knuckles.

"If I knew I could rely upon you absolutely—"

Sandy stiffened. His right hand raised in the Scout salute.

"'A Scout, sir, is trustworthy. He does exactly a given task, when trusted on his honor.' That's the first law we learn to obey. And if you will only allow us to try, we promise on our honor to do our best to deliver your bid to Mr. Gorse."

They waited breathlessly for his answer. It must be quick now, and decisive; for the train was rumbling closer. Perhaps Mayor Burbage remembered what Horace Hibbs had told him about the Boy Scouts; perhaps he realized, all at once, how much they had done already for the town. With a quick gesture, he held out the long envelope and the guiding map.

"Take the bid," he cried. "I believe you can deliver it safely. You have a wild, wooded, mountainous country to cover, but you can do it. Remember always

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that it will be a race, a race against time, not for personal gain or glory, but for the future of Lakeville."

It was to Sandy he gave the papers, but Sandy thrust them into Bunny's hands.

"You're our leader," he said simply; and then, because he could no longer bear the nervous strain, he made a wild dash for the door, with a deafening, "Come on, fellows!"

Except for Bi and Bunny, the other Scouts followed at his heels. These two paused long enough to loop over their shoulders two coils of rope to which the mayor pointed. They might be needed later.

Sandy didn't know how the other fellows felt about it, of course, but as they ran toward the station, it seemed to him that the Black Eagle Patrol was embarking on the adventure of a lifetime. A railroad trip of over forty miles; a hike of twelve more through a strange country, with only a map to guide them; and the constant knowledge, as Mayor Burbage had pointed out, that it was a race against time! Why, there couldn't be anything more glorious and exciting. It—yes, sir, it beat a circus all hollow.

The thought of a circus naturally suggested Jump. Sandy told himself a little bitterly that Jump had no business going along on the trip; he wasn't a Boy Scout. Still, of course, if the outsider paid his own way, they couldn't very well bar him.

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As a matter of fact, Jump was the first of the group to reach the station, where he sprang to the ticket window, laid a crumpled dollar bill before the startled Peter Hinkle, and gasped, "Crockton!" Behind him, brought up short by the delay, the Scouts looked at each other with startled eyes. They had forgotten all about the money question.

Outside, the train ground to a stop.

Seven of the eight boys searched frantically in their pockets, managing to bring to light a collection of pennies, nickels and dimes amounting to ninety-six cents. The eighth, Sandy Anvers, triumphantly exhibited his five-dollar bill.

"Give me your money, everybody," he commanded. "I'll buy the tickets. The rest of you get on the train."

With a flourish of his hand, he spread before Peter Hinkle the sum of five dollars and ninety-six cents.

"Crockton," he said. "Give me the tickets—quick!"

The experienced eye of the agent swept over the bill and coins as he began to stamp the bits of cardboard. After the seventh had been dated, he stopped.

"Eighty-five cents each," he informed Sandy. "That's—let me see—five-ninety-five for seven. One cent change. All right?"

The engine bell clanged. Frantic voices begged

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Sandy to hurry. Without a word, he swept tickets and penny into the palm of his left hand and ran out to the platform. Already, the train was in motion, with Bunny beckoning from a lower car step.

The trip had begun, the trip that Sandy had told himself he wouldn't miss for a million dollars, the trip that was to be a glorious and exciting adventure, the trip that was to be more fun than a circus.—Oh, he couldn't be left behind; he *couldn't!*

He was trotting slowly along with the train now, keeping even with Bunny, who held out a supporting hand to steady him as he stepped aboard.

"Hop on," urged the patrol leader.

Instead, Sandy abruptly raised his arm. "Here are the tickets," he said, giving them to Bunny. "And—and don't you fellows dare fail. Good-by."

A little later, Peter Hinkle came out of the station and saw a disconsolate small boy watching the train disappear around a curve in the distance.

"Heigh-o!" he exclaimed. "Thought you were going to Crockton."

"Eight fellows can't travel on seven tickets, can they?" demanded Sandy shortly, trying to keep his eyelids from twitching while the agent stared at him. "Somebody had to stay behind."

Peter Hinkle did not say anything at all. He glanced up the track to the point where the two steel

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rails seemed to meet, and then turned back and walked over to a loaded truck. Sandy wondered vaguely why he took such a long time to examine the tags on some of the crates.

"Want to give me a lift with this box?" he asked the boy presently.

By this time, Sandy's eyes were steady again. "Yes, sir—please!" he answered gratefully.

He liked Peter Hinkle. Peter was such an *understanding* man.

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CHAPTER XVI

THE TORN SHOE

Roundy Magoon, in the last seat of the car, moved over to the window side as Bunny came walking slowly from the outer platform.

"Where's Sandy?" demanded the plump boy.

Bunny dropped into the vacant place. "He didn't come," he stated solemnly.

"But the tickets—did he give them to you?"

"Of course!" Bunny said the words so sharply that Roundy squirmed apologetically. He hadn't meant to doubt the missing Scout.

"Huh, that's funny," he ventured, and then colored a little guiltily. He was always saying the wrong thing.

But Bunny understood the reference. "I should say it is. He acted as if there might be a reason for his staying behind, too."

Roundy pondered the mystery. It didn't seem possible that any boy on earth would willingly miss the chance to come along. He turned toward Bunny.

"What are we going to do with the extra ticket? Will the conductor buy it back?"

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Apparently, the patrol leader had not considered this problem. He opened the hand that still clinched the bits of cardboard, and counted them slowly.

"Why—why, there are only seven," he stuttered.

Roundy leaned over the back of the seat ahead. "Jump, how much was your ticket to Crockton?"

"Eighty-five cents. I paid for it out of my own money."

"I know," soothed Roundy. "That's all right, but—" He fished a stubby pencil and a scrap of paper from his pockets. As Bunny watched curiously, the other began a problem in multiplication, muttering the figures aloud. "Eight times eighty-five makes—um—six dollars and eighty cents. Too much. Seven times eighty-five is—is five dollars and ninety-five cents. There you are; that's the answer."

"What answer, Roundy?"

"The reason Sandy didn't come. We fellows chipped in ninety-six cents; he had five dollars. Well, that made only enough for seven tickets to Crockton. Somebody had to stay behind, and he did it. Simple enough."

So it was, too, as a matter of arithmetic. But both Bunny and Roundy fell suddenly silent, staring straight ahead with big, ashamed eyes, quite as if they had done something wrong. The sacrifice was so great that it hurt them.

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"Sandy's the right sort," commented Bunny after a bit. "It—it was a pretty nervy thing to give up that way."

"Aw, well, maybe he didn't care much for the trip, anyhow. Now, me—I couldn't be hired to miss it. Not me."

"You'd have stayed behind, too, I guess," said Bunny soberly, "if it would have helped the rest of us. Any fellow in the patrol would. You know our motto, 'One for all and all for one.'"

Roundy had no answer to this challenge. Turning to the window, he pressed his nose against the pane and watched the country fly past. He was wondering, with a queer, sneaky fear chasing up and down his spine, just how he would have acted in a crisis. There was Horace Hibbs, for example, who had turned over a tremendous sum of money that he might have kept and spent on himself. But his sacrifice was too great for Roundy to grasp. Sandy's was different, somehow; it appealed to him as more real, because Sandy was a boy like himself, and he could understand the temptation better, and what it had cost to down it. He could even imagine how Sandy must have wavered at the last, with his brain telling him to do the manly thing, and his legs reaching for the car steps, and his heart palpitating in shocked uncertainty, now galloping as he determined to clamber aboard the train and

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now missing a beat as he steeled himself to stay behind. Roundy asked himself what he would have done in Sandy's place.

"Shucks!" he muttered. "That's past and gone. Why should I worry about it? What I'm going to do is to forget all about everything except the fun we're going to have.—Hi, Bunny, look at that river will you? How'd you like to be swimming over there?"

Jump turned around to say that it wasn't much of a river; but before the argument was fairly started, the conductor came along and asked for his ticket, which Jump had stowed away so carefully that he had to turn seven pockets inside-out before he finally found it. By this time, the train had followed its curving track till it was by the very side of the stream, which at close view was so swollen and boisterous from recent rains that Roundy pointed his thumb at it and grinned maliciously. It was quite a bit of a river, after all.

A mile farther along, the train crossed it, creeping cautiously over a low trestle bridge that barely topped the roiled water. Even when they left the river behind, the engine failed to pick up speed again, but dawdled along its soggy roadbed with an utter disregard for time and schedule.

Seven o'clock found the Scouts only a dozen miles

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from Lakeville. By eight, they had no more than doubled the distance. Not only did the train appear to feel its way, like an elephant testing each span of rails and ties before it trusted its weight upon them, but it also stopped frequently, sometimes for many minutes, while the crew marched on ahead and passed judgment upon the track.

"If we were walking," said Roundy disgustedly, "we could whiz past this old Noah's Ark as if it were tied."

Bunny looked at his watch. "Well, hardly," he smiled. "We've been making ten or twelve miles an hour."

"Maybe we have," admitted Roundy as the train jolted to another halt, "but we're not doing it now."

Nor were they. The train barely crawled. Bunny counted the telegraph poles for another mile. "Ten minutes," he reported soberly. "I wish they'd hit it up a little."

But if there was any change in speed, it was a slackening. Nine o'clock came. Half-past nine. Still the train alternately jerked into motion and stopped again, over and over, in maddening hesitancy. At ten o'clock, after a delay so long that Specs declared the wheels must be glued to the rails, Bunny sought the conductor.

"What's the matter now?"

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"Unsafe bridge just ahead. We're going to cut in on the wire and telegraph for props."

"How long will it take to get them?"

"I don't know," snapped the conductor. He had been answering passengers' questions till he was prickling with irritation. "One hour—two—three. Maybe more."

"How far is Crockton?"

"About six miles."

Roundy took Bunny one side. "Let's hike it to Crockton," he urged. "We can beat the train."

"I know a better scheme," Bunny told him quickly. He borrowed Roundy's pencil and paper. "Here we are," he illustrated, jabbing the pointed lead at the lower right-hand corner of the sheet and drawing a line to the left. "Six miles this way—west—is Crockton. Twelve miles north of there is Gorse's place." He paused to complete the triangle by tracing its longest side. "Well, what's the matter with our hiking straight for Gorse's up this line? It must lie due north-northwest by the compass."

Scout-trained Roundy comprehended instantly. "That's the ticket!" he cried. "A short-cut and sure legs instead of a poky old train. Come on, everybody!"

They sloughed down the muddy bank of the track to the ditch below. Here lay a broad ribbon of water,

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but they picked their way across it on stones, and climbed the far side of the gully to the snow-break fence at the top. Once over this, they hiked forward at a brisk pace, over fairly level ground, till they reached a wall-like cliff, which the map designated as the "Palisades."

It was a reasonably steep climb, but there were plenty of footholds, in the form of sharp, outcropping rocks. Like mountain goats, the boys charged for the base of the hill and went scampering gaily up its side. Roundy, heavier and less agile than the others, soon found himself distanced.

"All right?" Bunny called back to him from somewhere above.

"All right!" Roundy assured him. He was breathing hard, and there were big drops of perspiration trickling down the sides of his nose; but he had no notion of stopping to rest. When he reached the level ground up there, he promised himself, he would keep pace with the best of them.

Besides, the real fun of the hike was just beginning. Beyond the hilltop lay a country wholly unknown to the Scouts, across which they must blaze their own trail, by aid of compass and map, to Gorse's hunting shack. Helping carry the bid to Gorse appealed to Roundy as being only a little less exciting than discovering America with Columbus, or penetrating dark-

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est Africa with Stanley, or searching for the fountain of perpetual youth with Ponce de Leon.

When he came to the brow of the hill at last, he almost stumbled over Bunny, who was squatting on a convenient boulder and gazing ruefully at a damaged shoe. The sole, long badly worn, had apparently wrenched loose from contact with one of the sharp rocks, and was now missing altogether.

"You can't hike any farther with that shoe," announced Roundy, as if this were news to the depressed group about the leader.

"Not unless you hop along on one leg," suggested Jump. "Guess you'll have to sit right here till we get back."

Bunny unlaced the shoe and slipped it from his foot. "Yes, it's gone for good," he conceded with a wry smile. In the brief pause before he continued, Roundy saw him swallow. "Well, Bi, you're assistant patrol leader. It's up to you to take the bid and go on without me."

Bi shook his head despairingly; he had no wish to shoulder the responsibility. But when Bunny quoted the second Scout law, about loyalty, his assistant nodded. It was plainly a duty he could not evade.

Nobody noticed Roundy sitting down. He was a good Scout, he hoped, and could make his sacrifice without any fuss. It hurt, yes; it hurt more than he

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would admit to himself. But that second law, that said you must be loyal to your Scout leader, was plain enough. Before Bunny knew what he was about, Roundy had his own shoe off. He tossed it into the other's lap.

"Try that on," he said gruffly.

He hoped it wouldn't fit.—No, he didn't either. But if it shouldn't—

Bunny's foot slid into the leather covering. The shoe might have been made for him.

"But how about you?" he asked curiously.

"Oh, I can hobble back to the train in your old one," Roundy said carelessly. "You fellows had better be hiking along, if you want to get there on time."

Then, because he didn't want to talk about it, or even give himself time to think what the sacrifice meant, he pulled Bunny's torn shoe on his stockinged foot and began to pick his way down the hill, toward the railroad track.

Half-way down, he stopped to look back. The Scouts were watching him in stunned silence, and they saw him wave his hand and smile.

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CHAPTER XVII

THE WATERMELON PATCH

Bunny shook himself into action. "See that tree yonder?" he said, pointing across the broad valley that sloped down before them. "The sentinel pine, all by itself, on the ridge. Well, we'll set our course by that tree."

"Prezactly!" shouted Specs, who was pulsing with the desire to be up and away. "And I'll beat you all there."

Flinging the challenge into the faces of the other Scouts, he broke into a headlong run. It was miles to the pine, through dense woods just ahead and over a marshy bottom farther along; but Specs was too eager for the journey to think of conserving his strength. Worse still, he set an example that S. S. and Nap were not loath to follow. Giving cry like hounds on a chase, they plunged after him.

Specs could run like the wind. By the time Bunny mustered breath for a warning call, he was at the edge of the woods, crashing loudly through vines and undergrowth. S. S. and Nap caught the patrol lead-

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er's command and halted reluctantly. The irrepressible Specs, however, was making too much noise himself to give ear to any sound fainter than a cannon's roar. In another instant, he had disappeared from view.

After he was far enough ahead of the others to lose all sight and sound of them, Specs thrilled to the adventure. He thought of himself as a pioneer of early days in America, blazing a trail into a wilderness never before penetrated by white men. The woods, of course, were not undiscovered country, but Specs measured the world by what the Black Eagle Patrol had seen of it, and he was assuredly the first of the Scouts to set foot in this forest.

For five minutes or more, he moved forward at a jogging gait that was half walk and half trot and that carried him farther and farther into the lead. Then, despite the grateful shade of the tall trees, with their interlacing top foliage, he began to grow uncomfortably warm, until finally he stopped to mop his streaming face with a handkerchief.

For the first time, he noticed how still it was in the woods. Except for the swishing murmur of leaves in the wind, there was no sound. Quite without reason, Specs shivered; and then, to cover this sign of weakness, he reached down for a stick and sent it hurtling on ahead. When it struck a tree trunk with a sudden

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crack, and all the other trees about sent back mocking echoes, the boy's body twitched again. The sudden explosion of a cannon could not have made him more nervous.

"Jinks!" he exclaimed. "I didn't suppose a fellow ever felt so—so *alone.*"

His voice sounded unnatural. In his mind grew a furtive plan to turn tail and run in the opposite direction, till he met the advancing patrol, and then to laugh and shout and sing with the other fellows. Too much stillness was getting on his nerves.

In the end, of course, he fought down the desire. He guessed he wasn't a coward. Besides, he now considered it his business to hew a path for the Scouts behind him. So, more slowly and cautiously this time, he resumed his hike in the general direction of the distant pine.

All at once, the woods seemed to stir with life. Squirrels scolded at him from the tree limbs, birds shrilled and flew at his approach, and once a harmless snake wriggled out of his course. There were dark shadows, too, that rustled mysteriously. Bears might be hiding—

"Not around here," he contradicted aloud, by way of bolstering up his courage. "Too near town for bears."

Head down, eyes searching the ground as he walked,

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he emerged abruptly from the dark shadow of the woods into the bright glare of the sun. Ahead of him, at the very edge of a clearing, was a fence.

He was almost upon this before he saw it, and he recoiled with a gasp of fright. It was a low, rail fence, covered here and there by green vines and patches of gray moss, and it zigzagged to right and left like some giant serpent. At first glance, indeed, that is just what Specs' inflamed imagination told him it was.

But when he had leaped back, away from it, he managed to get a grip upon himself. With clenched fists raised to the level of his elbows, he churned his arms out and in, swinging his upper body with each jerky movement, precisely as he might have done involuntarily had some hand gripped his shoulder and shaken him vigorously. And he said to himself, in a curiously impersonal manner:

"Buck up, Specs! If you don't buck up, I'll admit you're a coward, too."

He felt better. It was exactly as if somebody else was snooping around and watching for him to show the white feather. He even managed a smile of weak derision as he moved up to the fence and leaned on it.

The field beyond had a curious look. It seemed to be over-run with low weeds, but here and there the boy could make out a wriggly, snake-like vine. Nor was that all. Dotting the whole clearing lay greenish,

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striped shells, bigger than a man's head and bulging upward in the middle, like—like—

"Turtles!" guessed Specs triumphantly. "It's a turtle farm." He leaned over the fence for a closer look at one of the shells. "Oh!" he said slowly. With a shamefaced grin, he straightened up. "Oh!" he repeated. "Nothing but watermelons."

Now, the watermelon patch lay directly in his line of march. To skirt it, he would be obliged to detour to the right for perhaps two hundred yards, keeping always in the deep gloom of the woods. This last condition decided the matter. He would cross the patch. He wasn't afraid, of course, but what was the use of wasting valuable time and strength by going the long way round? He would pick his path carefully, taking care not to injure vines or melons, but—he would cross the patch.

Somehow, though he would not admit it to himself, he knew the greater temptation was still to come. But it was not till he was over the fence, and a good fifteen yards into the patch, that he was fully conscious of a dryness of lips and throat and an emptiness of stomach. It wasn't exactly thirst or hunger; rather, it was an undeniable longing for the red, luscious meat of one of the melons about his feet.

Probably, he told himself, the owner of the patch wouldn't mind if he took one. Anyhow—and while

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he attempted to quiet his conscience with this argument, he leaned over and thumped one big, green beauty—anyhow, nobody would ever know if he did tuck one under his arm and eat it as he walked.

"A fellow has the right to food and drink when he needs it," he whispered to himself. "There's nothing in our laws against that." And to prove the fact, he began repeating them. "'A Scout,'" he quoted, "'is trustworthy. A—'"

"A Scout is trustworthy!" The words were a blazing commandment. At the very outset, he had found his reason for not taking another's property. He was a Scout; he was to be trusted, not only by his fellow Scouts, but by the whole outside world. If he stole—yes, it would be stealing; he saw that now—if he stole a melon, it would be proof of his lack of trustworthiness.

The battle was waged and won. It hurt, but he knew the fight was his. But he could not resist thumping the melon again and wrinkling his face as it gave forth the dull, mellow sound that proved it dead ripe. Well, he—

"Hands up!"

He whirled at the order. Behind him, on the other side of the fence, stood a man with a shotgun. It was not pointing at Specs, but its owner, a farmer in overalls, held it suggestively ready to throw to his shoulder.

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"Stealing my melons, were you?" he accused the bewildered Specs.

"I was not," blazed the boy. "I tell you—"

"Don't need to tell me nothing. I seen you. Prob'ly leaning over to stroke that one's coat, eh?" The man paused, but as Specs opened his mouth to protest his innocence, the other began afresh: "Well, somebody's stroked a lot of them in the last few days, and had them stick to their fingers when they went on. I've got you, young feller, just where I want you, and I'm going to turn you over to the county sheriff."

Specs' heart slowed alarmingly. There was a great lump in his throat, and his eyelids were smarting. He wanted to talk; he wanted to explain as best he could. But he knew if he spoke now, he might burst out crying and thus disgrace himself before this bullying man with the gun. So he contented himself with a choked silence.

The farmer talked, though. He talked about the recent thefts of his melons; he talked about the profits he had expected to make; he talked about the labor entailed in clearing the field; he talked about the problems of the agriculturist in general. It seemed to Specs that he rambled on for hours without a pause.

And then, away back in the woods somewhere, the boy heard the crackle of breaking branches. The other Scouts were coming. They would blunder upon

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the patch, just as he had done, and the farmer would think they were others of Specs' gang of melon thieves. He might even gather them in and herd them to the nearest town.

Specs whirled upon the man. "I didn't steal anything," he shouted at the top of his voice. "I didn't intend to steal anything. You haven't any right to hold me up with a gun."

There followed a moment of silence. Specs strained his ears for further evidence of the patrol's approach, rejoicing over the absolute silence. Evidently, the Scouts had halted.

"I'm not deef," the farmer protested. "I can—"

"I didn't steal," roared Specs as loudly as he could. "I tell you, I didn't steal a single melon. I was just walking through your old patch when you stopped me."

"You hadn't no right—"

"Anybody," boomed Specs, "might come along and be caught, if he didn't know you were here."

The words carried like megaphone announcements. Again Specs opened his mouth to its widest, but this time no sound came. As the farmer waited for the expected explosion, both of them caught the far, faint call of an eagle.

"Kreeee!" it shrilled. "Kreeee!"

Specs knew what that meant. It was the signal of

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the Black Eagle Patrol, and it told him that his warning had been heard and heeded. A smile wreathed his face.

"And now, sir," he said in a normal voice to the man, "I am ready to go with you. I haven't stolen anything, and I can prove I have never been in this part of the country before. But if you insist on taking me to your house—"

"Come along!" growled the farmer. "You are a pretty nervy young feller, but—"

"Thank you," said Specs gravely. "You'd say Sandy and Roundy were pretty nervy, too, if you knew them. After we get to your house, I'll tell you what they did to-day."

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CHAPTER XVIII

NAP'S WATERLOO

"Listen!"

Bunny, leading his remaining band of five, stopped suddenly and held up a warning hand. Behind him, the others braked to a halt.

"I thought I heard Specs calling," the patrol leader explained.

"Maybe he's lost in the woods," grinned Nap.

"Scared green, more likely," said Jump in his nasty way.

Bunny silenced them with a gesture. For a long moment, the six boys stood motionless, chins up and ears straining for some cry in the distance. But it was not till Bi's feet were shuffling a nervous protest against this inaction that they heard it, a shouted protest of half-intelligible words:

"—didn't steal—tell you—melon—stopped me."

"It's Specs, all right," conceded Bunny, "and he's in some sort of trouble. Keep still, everybody."

The next shout was louder. "Anybody," they heard Specs roar distinctly, "might come along and be caught, if he didn't know you were here."

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It was Nap who first sensed the significance of the call. "He's trying to warn us to look out," he told Bunny excitedly; "it's a signal to be careful not to get caught ourselves." Then, as the others nodded in agreement, he threw back his head and shrilled, "Kreeee!" As the echo died out, he repeated the bird cry, "Kreeee!"

"Now he'll know we heard and understood," said Bunny. "Come on, fellows; we'll circle to the left till we're past him."

A little more sober and subdued than before, the six resumed their steady march. None of them could guess exactly what had happened to Specs, but each of them, including Jump, recognized that the missing Scout had sacrificed himself in some way for the good of the patrol.

Nap was the most outspoken. "Scared green, was he?" he taunted Jump. "Why, that was the bravest thing he could have done, and the cleverest, too. Napoleon says that more battles are won in the officers' tents than—"

But nobody paid any attention to this page from history, although Nap related it in great detail, stopping only to pick himself up after tripping over a vine and pausing now and then to get his breath. Bunny was setting a stiff pace that discouraged talking.

For another ten minutes, they hiked steadily for-

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ward, swinging always to the left. Once Bunny stopped to consult map and compass; and again, a little farther along, he bade the others wait while he ran to a bald knoll at one side, that gave him a view of the distant pine tree by which they had set their course. After that, they edged toward the right once more. Even Jump, with his lack of knowledge of woodcraft, knew this meant they were past the danger zone.

Three separate times they stopped because of some fancied cry of the missing Specs, but each proved a false alarm. It was little wonder, however, that the more impatient Scouts grumbled when Bunny held up his hand again. But he was peering, not backward and to the right, but ahead and to the left.

"Over there," he whispered, "behind those bushes. Do—do you fellows see anything?"

Jump, for one, could not, but he did see a chance for a little fun. "Looks like a bear to me," he gasped, and chuckled at the start Bunny gave. It was an open secret in the patrol that Bunny was afraid of bears.

Nap's eyes were keener. "There certainly is something crouching there," he said in a tense voice.

Instinctively, they all looked at Bunny. As a matter of truth, the patrol leader felt his skin grow cold, till he was sure it must be covered with "goose flesh." He wanted to run. But running, he told himself

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quickly, would be the worst thing in the world, provided some wild animal was really lurking behind the bush. Instead, he shied a stone toward the object, fully expecting to hear a savage growl when it hit.

What happened was even more dumfounding. The response was a cry—the wail of a little child; and as the Scouts rocked on their heels in amazement, a youngster of two or three crawled into view, sobbing lustily.

"Why—why, it's just a kid!" exclaimed Nap; "a little kid that's lost, like a regular babe in the woods. You poor little shaver!" He ran forward and picked it up. "You poor little shaver!" he said again.

Perched on Nap's shoulder, the child stopped crying at once. It studied the other boys with grave, incurious eyes, and then, wholly content, circled Nap's neck with a chubby arm and gurgled happily.

Nap wondered why the Scouts were looking at him so queerly. Did they suppose he was going to hurt the youngster, or let it fall, or drop it behind the bush and desert it? Then, all at once, he understood.

There was nothing theatrical about his announcement; he might have been telling them he was tired or thirsty, or that the sky was clouding rapidly, which was quite true. What he did say was:

"Oh, I see, fellows. The patrol can't spare the time to hunt for the kid's home. Well, the rest of you trot

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along, and I will see that it is turned over to somebody. Which way had I better hike, Bunny?"

"Back toward the place where we heard Specs shout," said the patrol leader, looking anywhere save into Nap's eyes. "It's almost due southeast from here, over that way." He paused, fidgeting uneasily. His eyes met the other's at last. "Sure you want to, Nap?"

"Sure," affirmed Nap quietly. "Good luck, fellows!"

They said good-by hurriedly, but not as boisterously as they usually did on other occasions, and fell into step behind Bunny. Nap watched the woods close about them.

"I had to decide in a jiffy," he told the child solemnly, "and maybe, if I'd had longer— No, I'd do the same thing with a week to think it out. I'm glad I did."

The youngster on his shoulder cooed gleefully. With a long laugh that was wholly genuine, Nap balanced it firmly and set forth on his quest of its home and parents.

Before he had walked ten minutes, he discovered that his task was not to be as easy as he had imagined. At the outset, the weight of the child seemed no more than a feather; now, on the contrary, it was fast becoming unbearable. With a frown, he shifted the

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human burden to the other side and paced on till shoulder and neck muscles ached sharply.

Surely, he told himself, he had traveled far enough to reach the spot from which Specs had shouted. Confident that he must be near the end of his journey, he bore the strain another five minutes. Then, as the child relaxed, making it necessary to hold its body firmly in place, he took it in his arms, as a mother carries a baby.

Still he saw no signs of farm or house. The fear that he might pass to right or left of his target sent the first prickle of doubt up his spine. He stopped to "halloo" a half dozen times. When no answer came, he forged forward again with fast beating heart.

Overhead, the gathering clouds blotted out the sun. The rising wind wailed through the tree-tops. The child in his arms began to whimper softly, as if it, too, were uneasy.

"I'm getting you home as fast as I can," Nap said querulously.

He reached up to straighten his cap, and found it gone altogether. He had a vague recollection of its slipping at the very start of his journey with the child, but he had supposed it was still perched on the back of his head. It was not a valuable cap, and he could get along well enough without it. But the loss irritated him.

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For five minutes, he walked rapidly. When he halted again, it was with the first suspicion that he had gone astray taking root in his mind. He stared doubtfully at the patches of dull sky showing through the branches and then at the trees all about him, as like as peas in a pod.

"But I've traveled in a straight line," he told himself; "I must have."

He started walking again, more slowly this time and with his confidence fast ebbing. He was nervous. At sight of a small gray object in his path, he shied suddenly. It was his missing cap.

The discovery left him breathing hard. There was no longer excuse for dodging the ugly truth. He was lost. Not only had he failed to follow a straight course, but he had wandered in a huge circle that led him back to his starting-point.

He looked to the sun for guidance, but the clouds had obscured it. There was no way of determining the points of the compass. Southeast Bunny had told him to travel; but how was he to guess the direction? His mind was as dull and dark as the sky.

He sank upon a fallen tree. His head ached, and the strength had gone from his limbs. An insistent cry beat at his brain, but it was minutes before he discovered that the sound came from the sobbing child in his arms.

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As he looked at the frightened youngster, the fog that had walled him in seemed to lift. He got to his feet.

"You poor little kid!" he said with gruff tenderness. "You've been counting on me to take you home; and here I am, a dozen years older than you, and a Boy Scout, to boot, sniveling like a quitter. I ought to be whaled."

All the woodcraft he had learned came back to him, as clear as the big print of a primer. First, he remembered that the tiny, feathery top branch of a towering pine or hemlock usually pointed toward the rising sun, a little south of east. Good! A single sweeping glance revealed three tall hemlocks, with their weather-vane tips all parallel. And the heaviest bark of a tree was on the north side, wasn't it? And the moss grew thickest toward the north, too. Anyhow, it did unless the prevailing winds— Ah, there was another guide: the wind was heavier, but it had not changed. It still blew from the south.

In a jiffy now, he had his course. Not only that, but he could work out the direction any time he chose. So, with arms swinging like a cradle, he set out anew, his heart lilting to the gurgles of the child, now as happy and confident as he was himself. He'd make short shift of the trip this time.

He did, too. It was a scant fifteen minutes before

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he reached the clearing, with its zigzag rail fence, its watermelon patch, and its path leading south. With firm earth beneath his feet, Nap trotted onward, first through a copse of shrub trees, then past a low barn, and so out into an open yard, with a cozy log cabin at the far side.

A woman came running toward him with a glad cry of relief. There was no need to ask who she was. He knew; and the child in his arms knew, too. In another moment, the mother had folded the baby to her breast.

Back of her stood a man, a big, burly fellow in overalls. Nap guessed he was the father, even before he felt his hand clasped and a voice asking where he had found the lost child.

"He must have wandered off by himself an hour or so back," the man explained, "but ma thought he was with me all the time. I was down at the melon patch. Five minutes more'n' I'd been starting to look for him. I'd 'a' found him, I guess. But"—Nap could hear the voice shake a little—"but it's a pretty wild country hereabout, and—"

"Hello, Nap!"

Specs stood there grinning at him, and Specs' voice called the greeting; but Nap had to shake his head vigorously to make sure he was not dreaming. After that fright in the woods, he wasn't as sure of himself

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as he had been. But it was Specs, all right—Specs McGrew.

"Wh—what are you doing here?" Nap demanded.

"Waiting to be arrested for stealing a watermelon I didn't steal," answered Specs coolly. "I was cutting across—"

"You two know each other?" interrupted the man.

"He's another member of that patrol I told you was hiking for Gorse's place," said Specs.

Nap nodded. "We're Boy Scouts," he confirmed, "and belong to the same patrol. We live in Lakeville."

"That's what I told him," put in Specs aggressively. "He says somebody has been stealing his melons for two or three days, but I said it couldn't have been me, because I wasn't in this neck of the woods before to-day."

"Is that right?" the man asked Nap.

"Yes, sir."

"I guess," the farmer said slowly, "I made a mistake. I kinda thought I had a spell back, but I was too stubborn to admit it. But a feller that brings in my lost kid ain't the kind that will lie. I—I am sorry, young man."

Specs held out his hand. "Forget it," he said awkwardly. "I did want one of your melons, mister, but I couldn't steal it, you know."

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"Why not?"

"Because I'm a Boy Scout, and our first law says a Scout is trustworthy. That's why."

"Oh!" The man looked affectionately at his young son, pulling at the mother's ears. When he spoke again, it was to make the handsomest apology of which he was capable. "When the kid grows up," he said, "I hope he'll be a Boy Scout, like you two. Say, how about a slice or two of watermelon? We've got one hanging in the well, cold as ice and juicy ripe."

Specs whooped his approval. The youngest member of the family stuck a fist in his mouth and purled something that might have been meant for "good." Nap said "Waterloo," and when they looked at him inquiringly, changed it to, "Yes, let's do."

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CHAPTER XIX

ON A HICKORY LIMB

When the nine boys had gathered in Mayor Burbage's office at Lakeville that morning, clad in everyday clothes, S. S. had been the neatest and best dressed of them all. This occasion marked no exception to the rule; it was the rule itself. If the Scouts had ever heard of a certain famous gentleman of fashion, they would have conceded readily that S. S. was the Beau Brummel of the patrol.

Now, the Scout uniform is both natty and serviceable. It looks well, and it is tailored to resist the wear and tear of hikes and camps. Not so, however, the output of the average clothing store. The more stylish a suit looks, the less abuse will it stand. And upon this indisputable fact hinged the downfall of S. S. in the hike to Gorse's.

With the recent loss of Nap, the little band now numbered only five. Four of the boys were too intent upon the outcome of the race against time to consider

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minor inconveniences; whereas the fifth, who was S. S., harbored other and real worries.

For every mile they advanced, his appearance paid a toll. Thorns tore rents in his stockings and scratched his shoes. Bushes lashed his coat. Soft, sappy leaves and grasses left green stains upon his pants-legs. Pick his way as he would, he could not dodge entirely these thieves of his trim attire.

When the sky clouded, with the promise of rain, he waxed apprehensive; when it cleared, and the threatening wind blew itself into a calm, he breathed easier. Another danger had been averted.

But worse was yet to come. For nearly an hour now, they had been hiking down a gentle slope into a broad valley, and suddenly, without warning, they plumped upon the border of a marsh.

It was a wet, soggy, impassable sort of a marsh, with dim expanses of green quagmire, thinly overgrown with small grasses and spotted with pools of oily water. Moreover, it seemed to leer evilly at the marchers, and ask, "Well, how do you expect to get across me?"

S. S. shuddered. He wasn't afraid, of course, but the swampy waste offered problems to a boy whose first thought was of his clothes. The outlook was anything but pleasant.

Bunny studied the treacherous barrier to their

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course. "Well," he said, "we can't ford it here." S. S. winced at the unhappy choice of words. "Suppose we scatter. Each fellow can make a try at crossing, and the first one who finds a safe path can yell for the others."

The plan was sensible. Somewhere, east or west, there was probably a series of hummocks upon which they could pick their way to the other side. Obviously, the quickest method of discovering it was to have the whole five of them searching in five different places at one time.

"Bi and I will go to the right," he told them, "and Handy and Jump and S. S. to the left. Spread out about one hundred feet apart in that order."

Three minutes later, S. S. found himself alone, at the tag end of the western line. Drawing a deep breath, he pushed forward into the marsh. All about him were reeds and flags, growing in rank profusion. These he parted or trod down, hopping nimbly from one clump of grass to another, till the vegetation became scanty. A growth of straggling weeds tempted him, and he put a foot upon it. Before he could draw back, he was over his shoe-top in mire.

He scuttled back to firm ground like a frightened hen. There, scraping and wiping the mud from his shoe, he considered gravely. Unless he wanted to emerge from the marsh looking kin to a hog, he must

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exercise some precautions. There was one sure way out of the difficulty.

Sitting down, he unlaced his shoes, kicked them off, and pulled the long stockings from his legs. After he had rolled up his trousers, he set forth once more upon the quest.

His second essay was more successful. He struck out some twenty feet from the original point, and managed to work half-way across the marsh before disaster overtook him. Once or twice, his bare foot squashed down to the ankle in muck, but this was to be expected. Out in the middle, though, he sank suddenly to his knee. It was his own fault. The next step had been an easy straddle to another hummock, but he had tripped and thrust a hasty leg into the open water.

Now, any other member of the patrol would have pulled his leg free and gone on. But S. S. hesitated. Suppose he tripped again! Suppose he fell headlong into the mire! He would never be able to get his clothes clean!

Still pondering, he picked a course back to the shore. In a queer, abstracted manner, he unbuttoned his coat and removed it. His trousers went next. He unknotted his tie and added it to the heap on the ground. Then, with quick decision, he slipped out of his shirt and underclothes.

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He now stood stark naked. If he fell, he could wash himself. If he found a safe passage across the marsh, he could yell for the other fellows, and dress while they came running to him. It was very simple.

He gathered his discarded clothes in his arms. Well back from the shore, in the woods, he straightened them neatly and hung them over a convenient tree limb. Before he advanced into the marsh again, he cut down a score or more of the tall reeds with his pocket-knife.

This time he marked his passage with the reeds, sticking them deep into the mire, until they stretched out like a row of telegraph poles. He reached the middle of the marsh without mishap, and strode cautiously forward. He crossed patches of bare mud, sometimes thinly caked on the surface, sometimes supporting straggling weeds that looked like green foam. Brown water bubbled up between his toes. But only once did he sink to his ankle. And in this way, blazing a trail of reeds that the veriest woodsman could follow, he reached the solid ground on the other side.

All this time, he had been straining for a call from one of the other Scouts. Perhaps, after all, there were many places where they might cross in safety. But now that he was certain of his own, he found himself eager to be accepted as the discoverer. He retraced his steps across the marsh. He bounded into

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the fringe of woods. Head back, he opened his mouth and hallooed.

The answering calls echoed to the east. Hard on their heels, he heard the sound of bodies crashing toward him. He had won, then. He had been the first to conquer the marsh. Chuckling his satisfaction, he dived into the woods to dress.

Jump and Handy were opposite him before he found his clothes. He halted them with a shout. Bi came next, and then Bunny. By this time, S. S., circling vaguely to right and left, was mildly embarrassed. Where was that old tree, anyhow?

"Hi!" called Bunny.

S. S. popped up from the cover of some bushes. To the boys at the edge of the marsh, only his bare shoulders were visible.

"Follow the reeds across," he told them, grinning awkwardly.

Jump whooped. "Why, he's undressed!" he yelled gleefully. "He's been in swimming."

"No, he hasn't," denied Bi. "He isn't wet."

They all laughed boisterously. Bi, humming an old ditty that S. S. had not heard for years, roared out the last two lines:

"'Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water!'"

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"Come on," urged Bunny.

"I—I can't," said S. S. bashfully. "I'm not dressed."

"Hurry up."

Crouching almost double, to escape observation, S. S. scampered to right and left. Nowhere did he see his garments hanging.

"Go on across the marsh," he called. "I'll be with you in a minute or two."

So they went, all of them singing:

"'Mother, may I go out to swim?'
'Yes, my darling daughter;
Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water!'"

It was pretty poor fun, S. S. thought. He couldn't see anything to chuckle over in a fellow's mislaying his clothes. He would tell them so, too, when he caught up with them.

But first, of course, he must find his clothes. The best way seemed to creep back to the edge of the marsh, keeping under cover of the flags and reeds, and start the search from there. He had gone, he remembered, a little to the left. Well, he'd go that way again. All he had to do was to spot the right hickory tree; there weren't many in sight.

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The first one bore nuts, but no clothes. The second, twenty feet away, was equally barren of the objects for which he sought. So were the third and fourth and fifth. He stopped in dismay. There wasn't another hickory tree within a quarter of a mile.

Across the marsh, the other boys had halted. They were still warbling that fool jingle.

"'Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water!'"

rose Bi's bass voice above the others.

S. S. was methodical. He paced anxiously from one hickory tree to another, and then doubled back again. But the result was the same. His clothes were on none of them. Moreover, he made certain that only five hickory trees grew in the vicinity. It was a baffling mystery.

"Come on, S. S.," shouted Bunny.

S. S. swallowed angrily. Did the patrol leader expect him to trot along as naked as Adam?

"Hustle up," insisted Bunny. "We must be moving."

Bunny was right, of course. The bid had to be delivered. No single one of them had the right to delay it. But the idea of staying behind, stark naked, in a strange forest, was hardly appealing.

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S. S. braced himself. "Don't wait for me," he yelled. "I'll catch up later. If I shouldn't—well, never mind. Don't wait. Go on to Gorse's."

He hoped they would protest; hoped they would refuse to continue the hike without him. For a long minute, while he listened to the hum of their spirited debate, he waited with a fast beating heart. But when Bunny called, "All right, S. S.," he felt strangely elated. He couldn't understand why.

A long time afterward, when catching up was out of the question, he saw the quartette winding along the side of a low hill, midway between summit and base.

"Anyhow," he told himself doggedly, "I found the path across the marsh. I helped. If I hadn't gone back into the woods and hung my clothes on a hickory limb—"

He stopped, with his mouth wide open. A slow grin crinkled his face.

"Hickory limb, my eye!" he exclaimed. "It was a maple. I remember now. That crazy song made me think it was a hickory limb."

Getting his bearings again, he walked into the woods, straight to a spreading maple tree, and pulled his clothes from the limb where he had left them.

"No use following now," he sighed. "Maybe I can find Nap or Specs."

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He turned his face southward, away from Gorse's. As he walked, he chanted, over and over again, the two lines he could remember:

"'Hang your clothes on a hickory limb,
But don't go near the water!'"

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CHAPTER XX

SMOKE SIGNALS

For some time now, Bunny had been stopping frequently to study and measure the map, and to peer searchingly from it toward the guiding valley at their left. At last, when he saw that the cut at the base of the hills curved westward till it was no longer parallel with their route, he spoke.

"Gannon's Lodge must lie up that ravine two or three miles," he explained. "Gorse's is straight ahead. We aren't hiking along any marked trail, of course, but if we were, it would fork about here."

"And Gorse may be at Gannon's?" asked Handy. He wanted to make sure of his reasoning.

"Ye-es," admitted Bunny ruefully. "He probably isn't, but—well, we can't afford to take that chance. We must know."

"Gannon's is too far out of our way for us to call there?" pursued Handy.

"We'd lose more than an hour going that way round."

"Right-o!" said Handy cheerfully. "Well, what's the matter with my trekking over to Gannon's while

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you fellows keep piling north-northwest? If Gorse is there, I'll signal, and you can come over with the bid. If he isn't there—"

It was Bunny who finished the sentence. He spoke slowly, that Handy might know exactly what he was volunteering to do. "Then," he said, "you can signal us to keep on. Only, of course, we'd have to leave you behind."

"Yes, I understand." Handy had been studying the problem for the last half-hour, and his voice did not falter.

"But—"

"Shucks!" scoffed Handy. "I'm elected. You're the leader; you should carry the bid. Bi is the strongest fellow in the patrol; if it comes to a pinch at the end, he'd be running along while I was on my back, with my tongue sticking out. And Jump here—well, Jump doesn't count, naturally, because he isn't a Scout at all. I've figured it all out, and that's the answer."

"If you really feel—"

Handy interrupted again. For some reason, he was eager to be on his way, to get by himself, to renew the fight he supposed he had won a mile back. "Well," he said briskly, "now that we've settled the thing, what next? How shall I signal? Wig-wag?"

"I don't know," confessed Bunny. "Of course, if

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you can find a high spot, where we are able to see you from across the valley, that will be all right. But Gannon's, according to this map, seems to snuggle down in a sort of depression."

Handy was the practical Scout of the patrol; his quick mind came to the rescue. "How about smoke signals?" he asked. "I'll build a fire or two: say, one column of smoke to signal he's not there; two, he is. Get that?"

Bunny nodded. "One means for us to keep on toward Gorse's, and two that we are to cut across country to Gannon's. Remember that, fellows."

Jump contented himself with bobbing his head, but Bi took the precaution to jot down the code in his notebook. The prize for which they were striving was too valuable to risk any confusion at this stage of the race.

Handy turned and began his descent into the valley. He walked at first, but presently both footing and slope combined to urge him into a trot. There would be time enough for plodding when he began his long toil up the ravine.

As the other three disappeared around the brow of a hill, Handy reached the bottom-lands. Here was marsh, with grass so rank and thick that it seemed to close over his head like quicksand; but, undaunted, he plowed his way through it to the creek-bed beyond,

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and so reached the real starting-point, as it were, of his hike.

The stream was a rushing torrent. Here and there, it had overflowed into dark, quiet pools, which Handy guessed must be of immeasurable depth. Often the forest grew to the very shores of wider, shallower lakes, making them forbidding and unfriendly in appearance. As he pressed past, queer birds squawked in the thick reeds, or some beaver sounded a warning by flapping the water with the broad side of its tail, till the still air rang like a rifle-shot. Handy would have given much for the time to stop and explore, but he had no thought of dodging his plain duty.

The creek narrowed as he ascended, hugging close the rocky banks. The pools grew fewer; the reed-rimmed lakes were no more. For nearly a mile, he picked his way gingerly, sometimes jumping gaps where the water had washed away his path, sometimes climbing to the summit of the bank, back in the woods, in order to dodge an insurmountable barrier. Once, baffled, he crossed the stream over some fallen trees to a rocky shelf on the other side, thus saving a long detour. But always he kept moving; minutes, he knew, were too precious to squander, and he had made up his mind to reach Gannon's by the time Bunny and his followers were opposite, a mile or more across the ragged country.

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Although the creek itself was now no more than a slit of foaming water, prisoned between rocky banks, the valley spread and opened as he advanced. It lay deep in its bed of forest, with great circling walls that might have marked the rim of some volcanic crater. Even Handy, the practical, realized dimly that he was responding to the splendor all about him. He breathed deeper of the clean, sweet air; his stride was brisker and more springy; he found himself eager to forge ahead and see what lay beyond each curtain of rock or foliage.

Better yet, the tumult in his mind had quieted. In some way that he could not put into words, his sacrifice became no sacrifice at all. He had chosen luckily. The other fellows were the ones who had missed the thing worth while.

For another half-hour, he paced onward with a song in his heart. He knew he must be close to Gannon's now, and he kept his eyes wide for the first sign that would mark the completion of his journey. But when he saw it finally, he sucked in his breath with a sudden gasp of dismay.

Ahead of him, as he rounded a knobby point at the right, he glimpsed two spirals of smoke, curling lazily into the still air.

Two! For one startled instant, his mind refused him the meaning of the signal. What had he told

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Bunny? One fire meant that Gorse was not at Gannon's; two—yes, that was it!—two, that he was.

There were still two hundred yards to cover, but he raced them at top speed. The lodge, a rustic bungalow, looked deserted. He wasted no time there; his place was in the clearing behind, where the twin fires smoldered.

As he turned the corner of the house, a man with a shovel looked up from a hole he had been digging. Handy guessed he was the caretaker of the place, but he did not stop to ask.

"Is—is Mr. Gorse here?" he demanded explosively.

The man shook his head. "Left yesterday," he told the boy laconically.

"Go to—to his own hunting shack?" gasped Handy.

"Yes."

So Gorse wasn't at Gannon's, after all. Well, he might have known. But why were the two smoke signals calling Bunny and Bi and Jump to turn from their course and come here, on a futile tack that would cost hours? Why was—Handy gulped back the questioning thought with a short laugh. They weren't meant as signals, of course; they were simply fires that had been built to destroy great masses of brush and refuse.

"Can—can we put out those fires—one of them?"

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The man looked at him curiously. "Not unless you tote over the whole creek," he answered.

It was his way of saying the task was impossible. Handy groaned. He must stop the Scouts before it was too late. But how?

The lodge lay too low to permit of wig-wagging. He might start a third fire, of course, but that would only prove confusing. Besides, three signals of any kind meant danger to Scouts and hunters. No, three would bring Bunny and the others that much faster.

A discarded garbage can caught his eye. It was at least four feet in height and as big around as a man's body. A great rusted hole at the bottom told why it had been thrown away.

"Look here," shouted Handy, "may I have that can? May I build a fire in it?"

The caretaker considered judiciously. To Handy, the delay was torture.

"May I?" he shouted again. "Quick!"

"Yes, I reckon so."

Handy pounced upon it. With a quick flip, he toppled it over and began rolling it to one side, toward a knoll by the edge of the clearing. There he set it on end again, and was back by the side of the man before the latter had time to marvel over these apparently insane movements.

"Matches!" demanded Handy crisply. He jerked

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the box from the other's hand. "And—and I want some of that fine kindling there." Without waiting for permission, he reached down and gathered an armful. After he had raced with this to the can, he stormed an unburned pile of green limbs, obviously just trimmed from the trees about the bungalow, and scooped up as many as he could carry.

The man watched him in stupefied surprise; but Handy, keeping him in view from the corner of his eye, saw that he made no move to interfere. With a jerk, the Scout yanked the cover from the big can and dropped in his kindling. A match, applied through the gaping hole at the base, fired the mass. As it blazed, Handy piled on the green boughs, fanning at the draft opening till they caught and shot upward a great smudge of black smoke.

It hurt Handy to see that third pillar mount into the air, but there was no help for it. Before he could put his plan into operation, he must be assured of a holding blaze. But once the fire was crackling and leaping in great tongues of flame, he clamped shut the lid.

A trickle of smoke oozed from the draft-hole. It was so little, though, that it practically dissolved before ascending higher than the tree-tops. Handy breathed a huge sigh of relief. He had been afraid of that back-firing.

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Now, taking a firm grip on the cover of the can, he lifted it just long enough for a single puff of smoke to escape. Like a toy balloon, it soared into the blue sky. When it lost shape and began to scatter, Handy loosed a second puff; and, after a wait, a third, a fourth, and then a fifth. Each represented a dot in the Morse telegraph alphabet, and a dot was the letter *E*, the call signal of the Black Eagle Patrol.

He knew that Bunny and the other two, even if they saw and understood the signal, had no way of replying; but he guessed shrewdly that the curious balls of smoke would stop them, at least, and make them wait for further developments.

The most difficult part of the signaling was still to come. Handy must spell out the letters *G A*. This call, as Bunny was certain to know, is the Morse abbreviation for "go ahead"; *G* is made with two dashes and a dot; *A*, with a dash and a dot. The real test, of course, lay in Handy's ability to regulate his smoke in such a manner as to make clear the difference between a dash and a dot.

He could have shouted with happiness over his success. The first dash of the *G* came from the can as smoothly as tooth-paste from a tube, and mounted lazily into the air without breaking. Hard on its tail, he sent a second; and, while the two ribbons of smoke waved toward the sky, popped a curling ball after

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them. There, plainly visible at one time, was the whole letter *G*—two dashes and a dot.

The *A* was much easier. Waiting till the bits of smoke had drifted away in a gauzy cloud, Handy loosed a dot and then a dash.

Three times he sent the signal, "Go ahead." Then, fearful that it might not prove wholly clear, he spelled out the words, "Not here." This proved more difficult, but he accomplished it. Some of the letters blurred, to be sure, and once a vagrant breeze threatened to pi the dots and dashes. But Handy congratulated himself that a keen eye and a keen brain could read them intelligently—and nobody in the patrol doubted Bunny's sight or understanding.

But to make certain, he went through it a second time. The cover of the can was hot by now; and it burned his fingers, and the smoke got into his eyes and nostrils. But he did not mind. Deep in his heart, he was confident that he had saved the day by his quick wit. Already, unless he was very much mistaken, Bunny and Bi and Jump were back again on the straight north-northwest trail to Gorse's.

He had forgotten all about the caretaker of Gannon's Lodge until the man touched his arm and asked, still miserly of words:

"Why?"

Handy wanted to turn toward him, close one eye,

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say mysteriously, "Because!" and then walk rapidly away, waggling his hands at his ears.

But he did nothing of the kind. It might be good fun, but it would certainly be discourteous and a clear violation of the fifth Scout law. Moreover, he was indebted to the man.

"I'll tell you all about it," he said with a laugh. "But first I want to thank you for what you did—and what you didn't do, and beg your pardon, and explain that I am not crazy. You see, it's like this—"

When the long story was told, the man nodded thoughtfully and said:

"Oh!"

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CHAPTER XXI

THE GRANNY KNOT

"There's your signal!" called Bi suddenly.

It was an hour since Handy had left them. During that time, they had pushed on steadily, holding fast to the compass course, until now they were in a higher, rougher country than any they had yet seen.

Bunny turned to the west. The twin spirals of smoke were like ghostly fingers beckoning for the bid. "Come!" they seemed to say. "Come to Gannon's! Gorse is here!"

Bi consulted the code in his notebook. "Handy's found him," he told his patrol leader. "If we hadn't been behind that ridge for the last half-mile, we might have seen the signal—look!"

Bunny looked, rubbed his eyes, and looked again. Not two ribbons of smoke now stretched into the blue, but three.

"That's queer," he said slowly. "A hunter fires his gun three times when he wants help. I wonder if Handy's in danger."

The third ribbon of smoke tore free at the bottom,

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and went waving into the sky, like the tail of a kite. As the boys watched, wrinkling their foreheads, they saw a black cloud-puff rise in its place. Another followed. And still another.

Bunny's brow smoothed. "I know!" he shouted. "Each of those balls of smoke is a dot—Morse for *E*. Handy is telegraphing the patrol call signal with smoke. Now watch!"

"*G*," read Bi. "*A—GA*. What does that mean?"

"'Go ahead,'" translated Bunny promptly. "It's a code abbreviation. See, he's sending it for the third time. I wonder if he means— What's that? *N-O-T—H-E-R-E*. That settles it, fellows. Gorse is not at Gannon's."

With one accord, they turned their faces toward the north and resumed their hike. When they stopped again, it was on the brink of a rocky ledge that might well have marked the rim of the world.

Below them, the mountain dropped away in a sheer, perpendicular wall of rock. So straight and unbroken was its surface that Bunny caught himself wondering if some giant had not sliced it off with his hunting knife.

"Whew!" exclaimed Jump, drawing back.

"Can't get down there without flying," declared Bi positively.

But Bunny, searching the side of the cliff with his

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sharp eyes, uttered a cry. "Yes, we can, too," he said. "See, away over there to the right, about thirty or forty feet from the top, there's a shelf of rock. Well, we can get down to that with the ropes we brought along, and if I'm any kind of a guesser, it leads to the bottom in a sort of natural path. How about it?"

Neither Bi nor Jump would commit himself until the trio had raced to a point directly above the jutting rocks. There, with heads bobbing over the cliff, they studied and agreed.

"Easy!" said Bi. Squirming back from the edge, he swung the coil of rope from his shoulder and began picking at the light twine that held the loops in place. "Here, Jump, tie the end of this rope to Bunny's while I finish straightening it out."

"Make it a square knot," advised Bunny, tossing him one end of the rope he had been carrying.

Jump's fingers wove in and out. When the knot was fast, he tested it with a slight pull. "Square it is," he reported.

Each of the ropes was about twenty-five feet long. When Bi had lowered one end of the combined line till it touched the shelving rock, there still remained a length of nearly twelve feet, which proved ample to reach and knot about a stout pine some two yards from the brink of the ledge.

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"All ready?" asked Bunny.

"Go to it," said Bi. As leader of the patrol and as bearer of the bid, it seemed no more than right that Bunny should be the first to descend.

There was one breathless instant as he swung his body over the edge. At the first drag of the weight, his fingers slipped, and he turned sick with the horror that he was falling. But when he had wound one leg through the rope and taken a fresh grip with his hands, he felt his body warm with the glow of confidence. Shinning down a heavy rope was no trick at all to a trained Scout.

The first few yards proved very simple. He resisted the impulse to glance downward, wisely concluding that he could not afford to risk the possible dizziness that might follow, and he kept himself from spinning like a top by thrusting his free toe and his two elbows against the rocky wall. Hand over hand, with his foot and leg acting as a brake, he slipped lower on the rope. After all, it was going to prove easy enough. He'd be down to the shelf in a second or two.

A depression in the side of the cliff, that had not been visible from the top, brought another shock of fright. As he swung out of reach of the wall, the rope began to sway, first like a pendulum, back and forth, and then in a giddy circle. His hands relaxed. His instep straightened. A full yard he slid, with the rope

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burning his palms, before his foot found a rest on the knot Jump had tied.

After a moment, he went on. The knot crawled around his twined leg, brushed against his face, reached his hands, and was left behind. His progress was more rapid now, with the wall once more flaring out to meet him.

Suddenly, somewhere above him, the taut rope gave a little. He gripped it with frantic fingers, doubling the wound leg till he was almost kneeling upon it. What had happened? Was the rope breaking? Had the anchoring tree jerked from the ground?

It seemed minutes before he could conquer his fluttering breath enough to call out:

"All right up there?"

"All right, Bunny," Bi's deep voice boomed back.

Well, he might have been mistaken. With a straightening of his leg, he unclasped one hot hand and lowered it past the other. Again he repeated the process; again, for the third time—

The rope slipped again. There could be no doubt about it this time; he had distinctly felt the lurching sag. No more than an inch had it settled, but that was enough to drive home the truth. Something was wrong.

Before he lifted his head, his frightened eyes stole one downward glance. The ledge of rock looked a

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mere path. If he fell, he would go toppling over it to the gorge below.

A new suspicion beat at his mind. The knot! It was Jump who had tied the ropes together; Jump, the boy who had failed with that very knot in his tenderfoot examinations.

As Bunny forced himself to look upward, the suspicion became an appalling reality. The knot was pulling loose. Already the projecting ends were dangerously short.

He tried to shout, to call for help, to yell for Bi to haul him to the top of the cliff. But the words choked in his throat. Perhaps, after all, this was as well; for any jolting progress upward might tear free the slipping knot.

For a long moment, till his courage surged back, he hung motionless. There was but one thing to do. He must climb past the knot before the ropes parted.

For the first time, he was aware that strain and nervousness had weakened his arms. They were aching and leaden. To raise them, one above the other, and to lift his body, bit by bit, over those six yawning feet to the knot, was a task that would call for his last ounce of reserve strength.

But he told himself grimly that he must do it. Cautiously and smoothly, that there might be no sudden jerk, he flexed his biceps. Inch by inch, his body

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traveled up the rope to the limit of the leverage. Without allowing it to slide back, he reached another yard with his freed hand, and began a second steady pull.

He had climbed half the distance to the knot before he felt the rope give again. As it settled staggeringly, he uttered a little cry of consternation and hunched his body for the fall. Surely, this was the end.

But still the knot held. As he realized that it had not parted, fresh hope welled in his heart. He remembered now that the rope ends had been whipped with light cord, to prevent fraying. Those roughened surfaces might yet prove his salvation.

Slowly he fought his way upward, every nerve a-tingle for the expected snap that would mark the final severing. He was breathing hard, like a spent runner, and his fingers clutched frantically at the frail support. Could he make the knot in time? Could he?

Muscles protested. Cold shivers of fear ran up his spine. Twice he told himself that the rope had slipped again, but each time he came to realize that it was only the disturbance of his clawing shoe-tips, reaching for footholds in the rocky wall.

It was a matter of inches now. One more long trestle with his right hand, and he would clasp the upper rope. But even as the hooked fingers came opposite the knot, some sudden jerk tore at the rope

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ends, and they shortened raspingly, till one was no more than a leering eye in its hempen hole.

The hand, paralyzed, stopped short in mid-air. With a last tremendous throb of strength, Bunny twisted his body to that side and drove the arm upward and in against the rope. Fingers clutched and held fast. And then, like a darting shadow, the left hand followed its mate, and both were holding with a savage intensity that no shock could loosen.

"Pull!" Bunny screamed to Bi. "Pull!"

It seemed an age before the other responded. But when Bi finally bent his big muscles to the task, there was no longer any doubt of the outcome. The rope shortened amazingly. It was only a matter of seconds before two strong hands clasped the patrol leader's wrists and lifted him to safety. Yet Bunny found time, during that jouncing, banging upward haul, to decide that the knot would never have held if he had shouted for help in the beginning.

Bi, big-eyed and wondering, stormed him with questions. For answer, Bunny motioned him to take hold of the rope that had been below the knot. His own hands still clung to the other portion. Now, as Bi gripped his half, Bunny gave a sudden tug.

The knot tore free.

Bi whirled on Jump. "Look here," he said sharply, "what kind of a knot do you call that?"

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"A square one," Jump answered sulkily.

"Let's see you tie another."

Jump took the rope ends and began to weave them in and out. Bi stopped him with an angry gesture.

"That's no square knot," he stormed. "That's a granny. You're twisting one end under instead of over, and the other over instead of under."

"What do you mean?"

Bi showed him, tying the knot slowly, that Jump might follow every move. Then Jump tied it himself. This time, thanks to the instruction, he completed the true square or reef knot.

"I'll know better next time," he declared. The words suggested his old spirit of bravado, but the tone was different. When he finished, a little meekly, "Nobody ever showed me how before," Bunny's anger dissolved. Perhaps, after all, the lesson would take root.

"What now?" asked Bi hopelessly.

The question wakened Bunny to his responsibility. "Why, I'm going down that cliff," he said in a matter-of-fact tone. "Only this time I want to tie my own knot."

He did, too; and secure in the knowledge that it would hold tighter than the woven strands of the rope itself, he let himself gingerly over the edge of the ledge, and climbed down, without accident or de-

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lay, to the shelf of rock. There, steadying the rope, he watched Jump descend, hand over hand, to his side. As the circus boy's feet rested on the jutting shelf, Bunny cupped his hands.

"All right, Bi!"

There was no answer. The rope quivered, but when Bi stretched into view, forty feet above them, it was apparent that he was not preparing to lower himself.

"Look alive down there!" he called; and the full length of the double rope dropped at their feet.

"What's the matter?" shouted Bunny.

"Nothing. But you fellows may need the rope to get the balance of the way down this cliff. Anyhow, it's liable to come in handy later on. I'll hike west till I discover some path to the bottom, but don't wait for me. There isn't any time to spare. Get along with you!"

It was no good protesting; Bi had made his decision. Like the others, he had sacrificed self for the cause. Of the nine who had started from the town hall in Lakeville that morning, only Bunny and Jump were left; and Jump, as Bunny told himself bitterly, was just a little worse than useless.

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CHAPTER XXII

THE LEAP FOR LIFE

Before they began to pick their way down the path to the gorge below, Bunny did two things. First, he looked at his watch. Second, with a hand shading his eyes, he scanned the northern horizon. In each case, the result was gratifying. It was only a quarter of three; and Gorse's hunting shack, less than two miles away, was clearly visible. The bid would be in on time.

Their descent to the base of the cliff was accomplished without untoward incident. Once, to be sure, Jump stepped upon a loose stone and stumbled, but he righted himself before there was any real danger. If it hadn't been for his sharp cry of fear, Bunny would never have known of the trivial mishap, nor been reminded of Jump's failing in the matter of courage. He wondered contemptuously if that "leap for life" in the circus wasn't purely a fiction of the posters.

Without speaking or waiting to see if the other followed, Bunny walked rapidly away from the cliff. A low murmur, like the drone of many bees, seemed

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to fill the air. It swelled to a sullen roar as he strode forward; but it was not till he had reached the stream itself that he understood the source.

The sound was that of angry, rushing water. Deep in a rocky cut, furrowed from the smooth surface of the valley, a mountain torrent raced and raged.

Bunny halted in dismay. Here was a new problem to solve before they could advance farther. The stream must be crossed in some manner, but how? Not by natural or artificial bridge, certainly; for there was none. Not by swimming in that mad current. Not by jumping from one bank to the other, unless, indeed, there might be some point where the gap narrowed appreciably.

This last possibility sent his eyes searching east and west, upstream and down. They rested at last upon a jutting promontory of rock, far to the right; and he ran to it, with Jump at his heels.

Bunny walked out the projecting bank to its farthest overhanging tip. Here he pulled up short with a decisive shake of his head. It was no use; his eyes had deceived him. From a distance, he had figured that this point was close enough to the other shore to warrant leaping the stream, but now he saw it was out of the question. The space to be bridged measured a full twenty feet.

"Too far to jump," he told his companion, raising

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his voice to make himself heard above the rushing water below them.

There was only one way left. Slipping the rope from his shoulder, he knotted one end into a slip-noose and began coiling the long lasso. When he lifted it for the swing that was to send it hissing across the stream, however, he paused uncertainly. There was nothing at which to throw; no peg of rock or stump to rope.

To make matters worse, a gnarled oak tree grew just opposite, with its hindering limbs twisting far out over the water. So irregular were they, and so shot with sprouting branches at the ends, that there was no place for the noose to settle.

He threw a dozen times before he gave up in disgust. Twice the rope rested about tiny twigs, but each time a gentle pull tore it loose. It was impossible, as he conceded finally, to knot it firmly enough on the far side of the chasm to make it bear his weight and permit of his swinging himself across, hand over hand.

"Come on," he yelled in Jump's ear; "we'll follow the bank till we find some other way of making it." He looked anxiously at his watch. "There may be time—if we don't need to walk too far."

Jump did not move. Bunny shouldered his way past, and then turned irritably to urge him along.

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"Higher on this side," he heard Jump mutter, as if he were talking to himself. "Good spot for a take-off, too. Yes, I ought to do it easily."

"Do what?" shouted Bunny. "You can't leap it, of course. Why, back home your best jump was short of thirteen feet; this is twenty if it's an inch. Come on, I say; we're wasting time."

There was no response. Jump moved a calculating step to the left and squinted through half-closed eyes at the other bank. Very deliberately, he marked a place in the dirt with his heel.

"I am going to do it," he told Bunny over his shoulder. "I can make that leap."

"How? It's too far."

Jump leveled his pointing hand. "See that smooth limb yonder, out over the stream? It's only ten or twelve feet from here, and we're a yard higher, at least. Well, I'm going to leap and catch it."

"You can't make it."

"Yes, I can."

Bunny applied the only test he recognized. His eyes estimated the distance; his mind pictured his own body hurtling through the air for the limb. He knew he could never reach and grasp it without falling; knew it as surely as if he had already tried and failed.

"It can't be done," he said positively. "I couldn't do it."

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"But I can," persisted Jump just as positively. "What's more, I'm going to."

Bunny's brain was in a whirl. This couldn't be Jump who was proposing this mad thing: Jump, the incompetent, the braggart, the coward. Why, Jump had faltered and gone limp and white that day on Roundy's window sill. Not ten minutes ago, he had again shown the white feather.

"No," Bunny said weakly. "No." His quality of leadership asserted itself. "You must not try it!" he cried out. "I forbid it! Do you hear me, Jump? I forbid it!"

Jump faced him with a queer smile. He was perfectly calm. "You haven't any right to tell me what to do," he said evenly. "I am not a member of the Black Eagle Patrol—yet."

Bunny clung to that last word. "But you want to be some day, don't you? And you want to obey? And you want to help the patrol? And—"

"Yes," returned Jump, "I want to help the patrol. That's why I am going to risk the leap. It's to help you deliver the bid on time."

"But if you fall—" Bunny pointed to the broiling torrent.

"I won't," promised Jump. "My Leap for Life in the circus was longer than this."

"But you lost your nerve doing that," Bunny re-

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minded him despairingly. "I read about it in a paper. They had to help you down from your platform."

A slow flush crimsoned Jump's face. It cut Bunny to the quick. He wanted to slap him on the shoulder, and to apologize for flinging the taunt in his face. But the look in Jump's wide eyes held him back.

"Yes, I lost my nerve there," the circus boy conceded. "But I've changed these last few weeks. I'm—well, different now." Something of the boy's old nature cropped to the surface. "And let me tell you, Bunny Payton, I could make that Leap for Life under the Big Top any time now. I'm going to do it again, too; I'm going to run away and join the circus when it doubles back this fall. There's the life for you."

"But—"

"I'm tired of Lakeville and you kids; tired of a hick town and its hick Boy Scouts. I'm no good, you think. Maybe. But who's to blame? I tied a granny knot back there on the cliff; I tied a granny when I took my tenderfoot examinations—and failed. Know why? Because none of you ever lifted a finger to help me, to show me how to do things. And I wanted to learn. I didn't leap to save Roundy that day, because you didn't back me up by believing in me. I've had to talk a lot to make me believe in myself. Nobody else does. And when I decided to join the patrol,

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because I needed friends, what did you Scouts do?" He lifted his head slowly, with a smile that was not good to see.

Bunny shrank back in consternation. This was a new Jump, a Jump he did not know at all. His bitter tirade was like the sting of a whip. It was an accusation: not the idle, careless boasting of the past, but a slashing arraignment of the patrol's failure to win him to its ranks. For the first time, with a guilty sense of shame, Bunny asked himself if the Scouts had not been partly to blame.

"Oh, well," Jump added, "I didn't mean to spiel like that. What you said about my losing my nerve set me off, I guess. Right now, though, I'm going to do something for the patrol, even if it never did anything for me. And that something is to leap this stream. Get out of my way."

Bunny stepped dazedly aside. Pacing back a half dozen strides, Jump turned and faced him. Before he started his run, he called out a cheery, "Don't worry; I'm not going to miss."

He came running toward the jutting rock at top speed. On its very brink, like an accordion suddenly extended full-length, his body straightened and flung into space. For one awful instant, while Bunny sucked in his breath in a very ecstasy of fear, Jump seemed to hang suspended, high over the raging torrent; then,

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having reached the apex of his leap, he plunged onward and downward.

Through eyes grown misty with horror, Bunny saw two arms fling above the other's head; saw them clutch gropingly for the limb that marked the goal; heard them slap hard against it; saw bark tear loose and fall to the stream; saw the fingers slipping—slipping—

Bunny's flooded eyes closed tight. With a frenzied gesture, he whipped a grimy hand over the lids and looked across at the tree. If Jump was not in sight—

But he was. At that very moment, his body was curling gracefully up over the limb, like that of a trained gymnast's; and two seconds later, perched at ease on his narrow support, he was waving his hand and shouting something unintelligible.

Bunny knew what he wanted—the rope. But the patrol leader's numbed muscles refused to answer the call of his brain. He shook himself angrily. There was no use acting the baby, was there? The Leap had been made; Jump was safe; nothing remained but to throw him the rope and have him tie it to the tree.

It was easy enough to know what to do, but actually doing it proved quite another matter. Not till he had flung the coiled line five times did it come within Jump's reach. Then, quite against his will, Bunny sat down abruptly. He was as tired as if he had been

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the one to make the leap. He couldn't understand his sudden exhaustion.

"All fast at this end," came Jump's awakening shout.

Bunny popped to his feet. He was stronger now. Before he had finished pulling the rope taut, and tying it about a scraggly pine tree a little back from the bank, the squeamish feeling at the pit of his stomach was entirely gone. He didn't ask Jump if he was sure about the knot at the other end; somehow, he realized that Jump would never tie another granny.

It was only a dozen feet across the gap, and Bunny covered them in half that many seconds, going hand over hand, with his body swinging rhythmically, just as he had done the same trick back in the clubhouse at Lakeville more times than he could remember. Once at the end of the rope, he said "All right!" to Jump, and followed him to the ground. But all the time he avoided the other's eyes, which wasn't very difficult, considering the fact that Jump kept looking anywhere except at him.

So when the circus boy called his attention to a little wisp of smoke, back across the narrow canyon, and offered to return and put out the fire before it spread, Bunny offered no objection. It was not till the other was swinging on the rope that he found time to wonder how the fire started, and why Jump should sacri-

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fice his chance of staying in the race to the finish, and what made him risk his life with that leap, and—well, other things; lots and lots of other things.

"If Jump doesn't get along better after this," Bunny said savagely, "it won't be my fault."

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CHAPTER XXIII

THE TRAP AND THE BEAR

But this was no time to consider Jump's problem of unhappiness. The bid was still to be delivered; the last lap of the race must be run. With another glance at his watch, Bunny turned away.

"Ten minutes after three," he said soberly, "and it's a long mile to Gorse's yet, uphill and bad going. Yes, I can make it, but I've no time to waste."

Before him stretched a broad, grassy flat. The sight of it spurred his flagging muscles; and he leaped forward at Scout's pace: fifty steps of walking, fifty steps of running, and then back to the walk once more. This speed, he knew, was good for a mile in twelve minutes under favorable conditions; perhaps half that fast when braked by underbrush and a climb.

So rapid was his progress, indeed, that he reached the far side of the little plain in a scant three minutes. From this point, the land sloped upward, with bushes and squat trees and tangles of wild grapevines to dispute his passage. But nothing could stop him now, he told himself grimly, and began the ascent.

Here and there, as he toiled forward, his eyes

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rested upon hazel bushes; and on ahead, a quarter-mile farther along, was a thick copse of the same growth. Probably there would be nuts there, snug in their burrs till the first frost split them wide. Even now, if he only had a few seconds to spare, he might find some not too green to eat.

But he shook his head. He could not lag for the search. He had more important business on hand. Hadn't the other Scouts dropped out of the race, one by one, that he might not be delayed? Hadn't they pinned their faith to him? Well, he couldn't fail them now, with the goal almost in sight.

He cleared scraggly undergrowth that hampered his speed, and sped into open country once more. His heart was humming a glad song. His legs were lifting and falling with the fresh stimulus that marks the runner's last yards of a race. He was almost there, he told himself; almost there—almost there. The words became a lilt, a pulsing roll, a beat to which his twinkling feet kept step.

In his exuberance, he no longer took pains to husband his strength. Grassy knolls he should have circled were climbed; barriers of rocks and stray hummocks were hurdled. He forgot everything except the one vital fact that he was traveling, straight as an arrow flies, toward the little hunting shack up the slope.

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He should have known better, of course,—he, the leader of the best patrol of Scouts in all the State,—but a mad frenzy of ambition to end the race coursed through his veins. Gone was all caution; gone, all dragging thought of possible failure. The bid must be there on time.

Another tangle of trees and bushes barred his flight. Like a bullet, he flashed through the outer fringe. A big, ungainly log lay just ahead, but he charged it joyously, and rose from a daring take-off for the hurdle.

A dragging toe hit the log. The laugh choked in his throat; his body relaxed for the inevitable fall. With a crash, his curling body hit the bed of dry branches beyond—hit and went on, not forward, but down; as straight down as a plummet drops.

The sun flickered like a wind-blown candle. He felt his right shoulder scrape a dirt wall. Earth and gravel showered about him like an enveloping cloud. Then came darkness and oblivion.

After a time, he stirred uneasily. A baby was crying somewhere. It wailed— No, it wasn't a baby at all; it was he himself, lying there whimpering weakly. Ashamed of his weakness, he clapped an open palm over his mouth.

What had happened? The last he remembered, he had been running. Yes, that was it: running and leap-

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ing and hurdling.—Now it all came back. He had jumped too low over a log, and tripped. He had fallen headlong. Into what?

Far above him, like the baleful eye of a guarding beast, gleamed a circle of light. Where he lay was only murky darkness. He couldn't understand. He resolved to get to his feet and explore.

In another minute, he knew the truth. He was in a hole, fully ten feet deep, with crumbling dirt walls. As he groped about its bottom, his hands encountered the brush that had fallen with him, and, after a little, something else that was soft and damp. It was a chunk of raw meat.

"A trap!" he gasped. "A pitfall, hidden with a covering of dry branches! "Maybe"—he moistened his lips—"maybe it's a bear trap!"

The fear staggered him, but he did not give way to it. At worst, he was alone in the hole; imprisoned like a wild animal, to be sure, but alone. Well, he'd better see about getting out.

No bear could have climbed those walls. Until Bunny found the slender stem, he would have said no boy could, either; but when his fingers closed about a tough grapevine, evidently dragged down by his fall, he changed his mind. A smart tug proved it fast, up above, and he climbed it, as he had climbed that rope on the cliff, hand over hand, to the top.

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In the bright sunshine once more, he was plagued by some disquieting thought that struggled vainly for expression. Everything was the same as it had been: the ragged ground that ended in the hazel copse; the warm, placid calm of the August day; the blue sky—And then he knew what was wrong.

The sun was not where it had been. Since he had sighted it last, it had dropped toward the western horizon.

He yanked the watch from his pocket. Three-fifteen, it said. He had lost practically no time at all. And yet—and yet—

With a sudden suspicion, he pressed it against his ear. There was no sound, no reassuring tick. The watch had stopped.

"I must have broken it when I fell," he groaned. "I don't know what time it is; I don't know how long I lay at the bottom of that hole. It might have been an hour." He paused irresolutely. "Well, worrying won't get me to Gorse's," he finished stoutly; and was off again.

As he neared the hazel copse, his nervous eyes caught a glimpse of black in the thicket. It looked like a fur coat. On the chance that it might be the man he was seeking, and quite forgetting that fur coats are not worn in mid-summer, he whooped and ran toward it.

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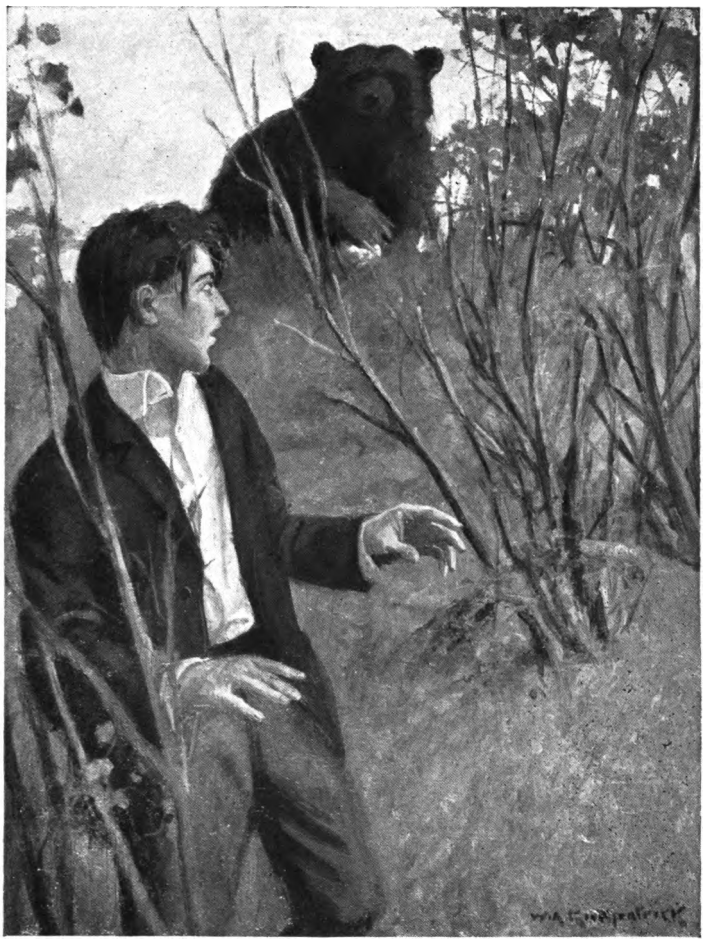

The bear raised its head and stared at him. *Page 273.*

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The bushes quivered. The black object stirred and turned. For the first time in his life, Bunny was face to face with a wild bear.

Scores of times, he had dreamed of bears; scores of other times, in camp or on the hike, he had fancied them creeping upon him. But always these unseen animals had been of reasonable size, say as large as a Newfoundland dog. This bear, on the contrary, was immense. Its black fur lay sleek and glossy; its eyes were little and mean; its five-toed feet, pressed flat on the ground, revealed ugly claws, long and sharp and venomous. Nothing in Bunny's wildest flight of imagination had equalled this terrible beast.

The bear raised its head and stared at him. Bunny stood like a statue, motionless and breathless. For a long moment, boy and bear blinked at each other. Then, just when the suspense was becoming unbearable, the animal growled " Boorrr " and turning, ambled away into the depth of the bushes.

Sweat stood heavy on Bunny's forehead. His hands unclenched with little glucks as the fingers quitted the wet palms. A sudden nausea left him sick and spent. It was like seeing the ghost that had haunted him all his life.

The bear was gone now. There had been no attack. But the lumbering beast had disappeared within the thicket that lay between the boy and Gorse's shack.

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To continue his plumbed line, he must follow it into those rustling bushes.

He couldn't summon the courage to plunge after it. Again and again, standing there with shaking knees, he told himself that he couldn't. It wasn't fair to expect him to risk his life that way. It wasn't right or reasonable. No, he couldn't.

He stumbled away, afraid to turn his back to the thicket. If he had not tripped over a vine, he might have kept on indefinitely. But the accident sprawled him into a sitting posture, and he huddled low where he fell, moving his lips silently and staring, with fear-shot eyes, at the hazel bushes where he had seen the thing.

There on the ground, cold-skinned and trembling, he fought out his greatest battle. He was not afraid of the things that ordinarily beat down other boys: darkness, lack of company in the still places, perils of deep waters or insecure heights, jeers of friends, threats of enemies, or the many tests of courage. But he was afraid of bears. Always and always, it seemed to him, he had been afraid of bears.

He won the good fight. He rose slowly and stiffly, and walked toward the copse where he had seen the beast disappear. Each step was a torture; each foot he gained made the effort that much harder. But he did not falter nor swerve. He had not conquered his

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fear,—that was impossible,—but he had mastered himself. He was going on to Gorse's in spite of his fear.

He reached the hazel bushes. He brushed them aside and strode into the thicket. Each snapping twig was like a prick in his heart; each dim object ahead robbed him of breath. Often he slowed, with one foot raised for a step, while he battled against the impulse to pivot on the other and flee; just as often, however, he forced it to the ground and marched straight ahead.

The wilderness of brush growth seemed unending. Doggedly, pace by pace, he fought his way through, till at last, as abruptly as the scene of a moving picture snaps from the screen, he came to the open land beyond.

Smiling down upon him from a wide plateau of tableland above, he saw a rough hunting shack. It was fully a quarter of a mile away, almost steadily uphill, but he ran the whole distance without once slackening speed. There was a rustic bench in the yard, and he raced to it, gathering his breath for a loud "Halloo!" before he sank down to rest.

The door of the cabin opened. From the dim interior, a man emerged, balancing a heavy-bore rifle in the crook of his left arm. At sight of the boy, he stopped short.

"Hello!" he exclaimed good-naturedly, pointing to

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the gun. "I brought this out on the chance that my visitor might prove to be a bear." As Bunny's facial muscles twitched nervously, he hastened to explain. "Fact is, a big black bruin has just about decided he lives here. I dug a pitfall trap for him down yonder, but he's quite as likely to wander into my yard as into that hole."

Bunny fumbled in his coat pocket. His tale of the bear could wait; the delivery of the bid could not. "Here, Mr. Gorse," he said thickly, "is a bid for your Fair Play Factory."

"From Lakeville? You're the Scout leader I met in Mr. Stanton's office, aren't you? I thought so. Let me see what that newly awakened town has to offer."

His practised eyes ran over the figures. Bunny watched him nod, and felt the warm blood begin to course anew through his body. He had won, then; after all, he had won the race against time. Before Mr. Gorse spoke, he knew that the bid topped the others.

"Yes," the man said in answer to the unspoken question, "this bid is satisfactory in every respect. That means— Wait a moment, though."

He drew a closed watch from his pocket and snapped open the case. It seemed to Bunny that he looked at it a very long while.

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"I am sorry," said Mr. Gorse finally, "but this bid is void. I made four o'clock to-day the final time limit for receiving offers, and it is now"—he held up the watch for Bunny to see—"it is now three minutes of five. Lakeville's bid is too late by nearly an hour."

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CHAPTER XXIV

ADVANCED ARITHMETIC

Bunny sagged back on the seat, with a helpless feeling that the world had come to an end. Too stunned and miserable for words, he could only stare dumbly at Mr. Gorse.

"Yes," repeated the president of the Fair Play Factory, "Lakeville's bid is too late by nearly an hour."

Bunny managed to swallow the lump in his throat. "Are you sure, sir, that your watch isn't fast?"

"I have no reason to doubt it," said Mr. Gorse, frowning a little, as if he wished he might. "It has always kept good time."

"But—but maybe something happened to it," the boy persisted. "Watches sometimes go wrong without any reason. I—I guess, sir, you don't realize how much reaching you in time means to me—to all of us Boy Scouts. We promised Mayor Burbage we'd do it, and if he hears—"

"Ah!" interrupted Mr. Gorse softly. "So that's the rub. 'If he hears,' eh?" He leaned forward

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confidentially. "Look here, young man. Only the two of us know when you delivered the bid. I like the present Lakeville, and I shall save money by building there; you and your Boy Scouts will be heroes if I accept this bid. Come now, shall we agree to forget all about the time?"

Bunny's prompt answer came in a blaze of indignant protest. "No, we shan't!"

"Why not?"

It was hard to explain, but Bunny began manfully: "We—I mean, my patrol and everybody else in Lakeville—want your factory to come there, but we want to get it honestly. If we can't have it that way, we don't want it at all."

"Exactly!" said Mr. Gorse quietly. With a sudden suspicion, Bunny looked up in time to catch the twinkle in the man's eyes.

"Why—why, you wouldn't have done it, if I had said yes," he accused. "Of course not. You didn't have to tell me about the time at all, in the first place. I—I beg your pardon, sir."

Mr. Gorse walked over and put a hand on the boy's shoulder. "I am the one to ask pardon," he apologized. "It was hardly a fair test, but you met it squarely. If the rest of Lakeville is like you, I am sorrier than ever about the late bid. I should like your town."

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"I know you would," put in Bunny impetuously. "It's your kind, sir."

Mr. Gorse laughed, but Bunny was shrewd enough to realize that the compliment had pleased him. He liked Mr. Gorse, liked him immensely; and he knew Lakeville would, too. The thought made the loss of the factory all the harder to bear.

"Suppose," he ventured presently, "your watch should be fast?"

"I would give a good deal," said Mr. Gorse quickly, "if you could prove to me that it is. But there isn't another timepiece about the place; no, nor one closer than Gannon's, either. If mine has gone off on a tangent, it is probably gaining all the time; so a comparison to-morrow, for example, would prove nothing."

Bunny squinted at the high sun. "It can't be as late as your watch says," he muttered doggedly. "I—I know! I'll make a sun-dial."

Mr. Gorse smiled tolerantly. "Go ahead," he encouraged. "Only, if I recall any woodcraft, the pointer of a sun-dial must be aimed exactly at the pole star, which won't be visible till to-night. How about it?"

For a moment, Bunny confessed himself stumped. Then, as his mind groped for the facts, his face cleared. He could construct a sun-dial without waiting to sight by the north star.

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"That's just to make the pointer the same angle as the latitude," he explained. "This part of the country is 45 degrees, figuring it roughly. Understand? The pointer will be just half-way between the horizontal and the perpendicular."

Under his direction, Mr. Gorse found him a broad, flat board, upon which Bunny drew a big circle. This was marked easily and perfectly by the simple use of a nail for an axis and a piece of string half the width of the diameter, with a pencil tied to its end. Dividing the circle into twenty-four parts took longer, but it simmered down to a question of slicing it first into thirds, then into sixths, and so to the final sections. The pointer was next set in place.

"Now what?" asked Mr. Gorse, quite as interested as the boy.

"A dead level," answered Bunny. "Let's see. May I borrow a bucket? Thanks. You see, sir, when I fill it from rim to rim with water, propping up the low side till none splashes over, I know it is dead level." He busied himself at the task. "There! Now I'll put my sun-dial on top of the bucket while I locate exact north with my compass."

As the board came to rest, with the line marked *twelve* pointing due north, the two stepped back. Upon the divided circle, well to the right, rested the shadow of the pointer.

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"Half-past four!" shrieked Bunny. "You're over an hour fast."

"Twenty after five," announced Mr. Gorse, studying his watch and shaking his head. "Your sun-dial may be the closer of the two, but I am afraid that it is too rough a way to compute time in a matter as important as this. I should like to believe what the pointer says, but—well, my conscience will hardly permit. Is there any other method of checking up on your experiment?"

Bunny thought hard. Nothing he had ever read seemed to fit the case, but he did not despair. Surely, there must be some other way; there *must!*

With a whoop, he solved the problem.

"May I borrow your watch, Mr. Gorse?"

"Certainly." The man gave it to him.

"This is just to prove that your time is wrong," Bunny told him. "You see, if you point the hour hand of a watch at the sun, south will be half-way between it and the numeral XII." He shifted the watch about on the board till he had it in position. "There it is, off to this side."

"But I don't understand."

"Wait. The watch says that direction is south. Now we'll compare it with my compass." Breathlessly he laid the instruments side by side. "There, Mr. Gorse! Look there!"

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It was now half-past five. South, according to the computation, lay toward a point just short of the numeral III. But the wavering needle of the compass, coming to rest at north, did not agree. Its blunt end sighted far to the left of the hour hand of the watch.

Mr. Gorse was deeply interested now, but he still shook his head. "You have the idea, all right," he conceded, "but you are only giving me the approximate time. Still—" He paused reflectively. "By Jove!" he added. "There must be some basis for determining it. Wait till I get a sheet of paper."

It proved a most elaborate calculation. For nearly half an hour, Bunny fidgeted while Mr. Gorse's pencil scratched a forest of figures. Even then, the man seemed doubtful.

"I'll go over it again," he decided. "First, of course, there are 360 degrees in the circle of a compass and sixty in that of a watch. Now, from the standpoint of the hour hand, the sixty degrees of a watch represent twelve times sixty, or 720 minutes of time. Superimposing"—he looked up with a smile at the word—"superimposing the watch on the compass, I figure one compass degree will equal one-sixth of a watch degree, or, to put it the other way round, one watch degree equals six compass degrees. Each watch degree, based on the hour hand, stands for twelve minutes of time."

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So far, Bunny managed to follow the problem, though it taxed his thinking powers to the limit.

"Now," continued Mr. Gorse, "we'll call the point half-way between the hour hand and XII on my watch, Trial-South. If the watch is accurate, this Trial-South will agree with True-South of the compass. But it does not. Conceding that the watch is fast, Trial-South will naturally fall between True-South and the hour hand; that is, it will follow the hour hand and be ahead of where it should be. Do you understand?"

"I guess so," said Bunny doubtfully.

"Next, it is clear that if my watch is fast, its gain equals the difference in compass degrees between True-South and Trial-South, multiplied twice by two. It is doubled once because the sun makes a course of twenty-four hours and the clock only twelve; and it is doubled a second time because each compass degree represents two minutes of time. Now, comparing my watch with your compass, I find that True-South falls sixteen degrees to the six o'clock side of Trial-South. Multiplying that by two gives me thirty-two; and again multiplying by two, I get sixty-four, which—ah—yes, which means that my watch is one hour and four minutes fast."

In the meantime, Bunny had been attacking the problem in his own mind. His method was so simple that he hesitated to compare it with the other's elabo-

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rate tables. But he reasoned that Mr. Gorse hadn't named his factory Fair Play for nothing.

"I think I can figure it out easier," he offered humbly.

Mr. Gorse wiped his forehead with a handkerchief. "If you know a short-cut," he said cordially, "teach it to me."

"All right." Bunny took his own stopped watch from his pocket and whirled the hands until they agreed with the other timepiece, which now said six o'clock. As Mr. Gorse watched, puzzled, the boy pointed at the compass. "It says south is yonder, over that big rock; my watch says it is to the right, directly over the III. Now I'll turn back the watch till it agrees with the compass." He moved the hands slowly back a full hour. Still the point midway between the hour hand and XII was a tiny fraction of a dot to the right. At five minutes of five, watch and compass south were the same. Bunny looked up with a smile. "That is the right time," he finished exultantly.

"H'm!" remarked Mr. Gorse in a crestfallen manner. "You've hit on the short-cut. We are both agreed now that I am over one hour fast."

"Then I was here on time?" asked Bunny eagerly. "The bid was delivered before four o'clock."

"Yes. Lakeville gets the factory. But hold a bit!

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Isn't it possible that your compass is inaccurate? If it should be—"

He raised his head to listen. From the road beyond the trees sounded the thud of hoof-beats, growing louder and nearer, till a horse trotted into sight, hitched to a light wagon. Upon the seat, squeezed in beside the driver, sat S. S. and Nap. Behind, waving his hand and shouting, was Specs.

It was like the reunion of a family long separated. Piling pell-mell from the wagon, the three boys rushed upon Bunny. S. S., pausing to brush a speck of dust from his coat, came last, but he soon added his voice to the babel.

Because they all insisted on talking at once, it took Bunny some time to understand their presence. But after a bit, by judicious questioning and urging, he made out that Nap had taken the lost child home to its parents, where he had discovered Specs in the custody of its father, who shortly proved his fairness and generosity by offering to drive them to Gorse's. Just as they were starting, it seemed, the disconsolate S. S. had wandered into the yard and joined his fellow Scouts. Yes, Specs said, S. S. had on clothes. Otherwise, he probably would never have wandered into the yard or been brought to Gorse's.

Bunny was duly introduced to the melon man, who appeared very much embarrassed over the boy's frank

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gratitude. Bunny was thanking him for the third (or was it the seventh?) time, when a hail from behind brought him right-about-face.

Trudging wearily up the slope from the valley came Bi and Jump. Their arrival demanded more explanations, of course. Bi, according to his story, had followed the cliff a mile or more to the west, where he had found a dry water-course leading downward. Retracing his way east along the bottom of the gulch, he had come upon Jump, sitting stoically before a burnt patch of grass, long since charred and cold. Together they had crossed the stream on the rope and followed the trail to Gorse's.

"The fire must have started from a folding magnifying glass I lost through a hole in my pocket," explained Jump. "Anyhow, I found it, wide open and with the glass blackened from smoke, just where the fire first caught."

They had seen no bears.

As if this were not excitement enough for one day, a buggy rattled in from the east, with Gannon's caretaker and Handy perched on the seat; and everybody listened open-mouthed while Handy recounted his adventures at signaling.

Only Sandy and Roundy were now missing from the fold, and Bunny easily accounted for them. Roundy was presumably in Crockton, if the stalled

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train ever reached that town; and Sandy was safe, and probably very lonesome, back in Lakeville. Everything had turned out wonderfully well except—

Bunny turned to the owner of the watermelon patch. "What time is it?" he asked.

The farmer pulled a thick watch from his pocket. "Quarter after five," he replied.

Bunny's eyes rested upon Gannon's caretaker. "Is that right?"

"Yes," said that miser of words.

Mr. Gorse was holding out his own watch for Bunny to see. It marked half-past six.

"I was only about ten minutes off in my calculations," he stated with pardonable pride. "My watch is one hour and fifteen minutes fast."

"And the bid?"

"The bid?" Mr. Gorse smiled genially. "Why, the bid was delivered well before four o'clock, of course. The Fair Play Factory goes to Lakeville." He waited till they were through cheering. "I'm hungry," he announced frankly. "There's plenty of chuck in the shack, but, can any of you fellows cook?"

"We all can," Bunny told him.

"Is there anything," asked Mr. Gorse with profound respect, "that you don't know how to do? I hope Lakeville appreciates you Boy Scouts."

Lakeville did—as it turned out.

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CHAPTER XXV

UNDER THE BIG TOP

How Mr. Gorse persuaded the melon man and Gannon's caretaker to drive the seven boys to Crockton the next day; how they forded streams still swollen, and jacked the carriages out of muddy ruts, and built roads where they had been washed away; how they found Scout Master Stanton and Roundy Magoon together in Crockton, on the point of hiking into the woods in search of the missing patrol; how Mayor Burbage discovered too late that he had neglected to give them money for the trip, and telegraphed a trusted friend in Crockton to look after them; how Lakeville went fairly insane over their success in getting the Fair Play Factory to locate there,—these stories would be well worth the telling if something greater in interest had not dwarfed their importance within the fortnight.

For the circus came to Lakeville. Yes, sir, Campbell's Biggest and Best Wagon Show on Earth, with its Marvelous and Magnificent Menagerie, its Superb and Stupendous Side-show of Freaks and Curiosities, its Glittering, Gorgeous Parade—Two Performances

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a Day, Rain or Shine—came to Lakeville. Not even the oldest inhabitant could remember such a day.

As for the Scouts themselves, it need only be said that from the moment the advance car took the switch, and a busy crew of bill-posters swarmed the town and surrounding country, fixing into place three-sheet lithographic likenesses of all the beasts that roam the earth and all the varied performers that disport in mid-air or close to sawdust (to say nothing of clowns and uncommon folk of that ilk), the members of the Black Eagle Patrol stopped talking about the hike to Gorse's. That's how extraordinary they considered the coming of the circus.

Long before two o'clock on the afternoon of the fateful day, the Scouts rustled their programs and waited impatiently for the show to begin. Already they had passed favorable judgment upon the five-legged calf, the fat woman, the living skeleton, the wild man of Borneo, the snake-charmer, the tattooed man, and countless other semi-human importations. In the outer tent, they had laughed at the frolicsome monkeys, fed peanuts to the elephant (the very same elephant they had seen that other day on Feather Point), and gasped and gawked at the score of caged animals. Still earlier, before daybreak, they had met the incoming circus wagons far out in the country and escorted them to the show lot, back of Grogan's

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Feed Store, where they had renewed their acquaintance with Mr. Henderson, Mr. Reilly, and Mr. Dean, of the Flying DeVallos; the juggler; the serious-faced clown, who knew all about Napoleon; and the strong man, who played with cannon balls. As a final fillip of delight, they had watched the long parade. And now they were ready for the show itself.

Moreover, they sat where they could see every act, not at one end of the tent, in the quarter section, but exactly opposite the ring, on cushioned planks with hinged backs, roped off to all save those favored few who could present reserved seat coupons to the lively ushers at the portals.

This was Jump's treat. When the first lurid poster nestled pastily into place, he had written his father to hold the seats. Promptly the tickets had come, a round dozen of them, with the compliments of the Biggest and Best Wagon Show on Earth. Memories may be short in the circus world, but the youngest DeVallo was clearly not forgotten.

The "Big Top" was packed to capacity. Since early that morning, farmers' rigs had been pouring into town, till now they lined the streets in a solid phalanx. The new quick-lunch counter in the long vacant Giddings building had been crowded two deep for hours. The soda fountain at the Elite Pharmacy was as dry as a bone. The shelves of the merchants

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showed gaps that told of brisk selling. Everywhere people pushed and crowded. If any man, woman, or child within twenty miles of Lakeville had elected to stay home that day, Lakeville was glad. There simply wasn't room for another soul.

At the north end of Main Street, high overhead, a great banner stretched from side to side. At the south end waved its twin. Each said, in big, black, printed letters, "Welcome to Wide Awake Town!" Even Dunkirk citizens, driving over for the circus, did not laugh at the transparencies; for if ever there was a wide awake town, Lakeville was one that day.

Quite as it should have been, Bunny occupied the choicest seat in all the big tent. On his right sat Molly Sefton; on his left, Horace Hibbs. Scattered on either side of them were the other members of the patrol, Scout Master Stanton, and President Gorse of the Fair Play Factory. As Molly remarked sagely, it was probably the most important party before which the Biggest and Best had ever played.

"But where's Jump?" she asked, helping herself generously from the bag of peanuts a vender had asked her to pass to Roundy.

"Back in the performers' tent," Bunny answered. He gulped uneasily. "Jump's going to join the circus again, I guess."

"The idea!" exclaimed Molly in virtuous reproof.

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"It's not the proper life for a boy. Who told you he was."

"Jump did."

"But I thought he was going to be a member of your patrol, after Sandy Anvers goes away to boarding-school next week."

"No-o," confessed Bunny. "Circus people are the only kind Jump likes. He—he thinks we Scouts are a bunch of hicks."

"Why the very idea!" said Molly scornfully. "Only yesterday he told me—"

The crash of music drowned the words. Canvas flaps at one end of the tent parted, and the elephant strode majestically into view. Around the hippodrome track, the entry blared and boomed, unfolding into a line of colorful march. Not a Scout moved or spoke till the parade dissolved suddenly, with its members scampering for platform and ring. But when the band wailed its final chord, with cream-white high school horses pawing at the sawdust, trapezes swinging to the pull of gymnasts in red and pink and blue tights, and planks bending to their burden of dumbbells and steel balls, the patrol voiced its noisy approval.

"—told me," went on Molly complacently, quite as if there had been no interruption, "that you fellows were the finest bunch on earth."

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"Oh, I guess not."

"Oh, I guess *so*," the girl retorted ambiguously. "He said you'd spent a lot of time lately, since you carried that bid to Gorse, showing him how to do things: cook, you know, and track, and signal, and—and tie all kinds of knots. Didn't you?"

Bunny squirmed. "Well—yes."

By this time, the band was playing again; the horses were loping about the ring, with pirouetting girls on their broad backs; and a strong man and a juggler were vying with each other on the platform. No conversation could flourish in the face of such competition.

"Jump told me," Molly resumed confidentially as the acts ended, "that when he first came to Lakeville, he didn't care whether you Scouts liked him or not. He talked too much, I guess—bragged. And then, when he decided he did want to be—*in* with you, you wouldn't have anything to do with him." She puckered her freckled nose. "I know how he felt. Pretty much the same thing happened to me when we first moved to Elkana."

Bunny nodded guiltily. In the beginning, he had tried honestly to make friends with Jump; but, after the first rebuffs, none of the Scouts had bothered to keep on trying. The memory robbed him of half his pleasure in watching the horizontal bar exhibition.

"My, how I suffered!" Molly admitted. "I nearly

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made up my mind to run away from home. I didn't—quite. But if— Do you think Jump felt that way?"

Bunny nodded. "I know he did." He stopped till the ring hands had carried out tubs for the elephant's posing act. "On our hike, he told me—well, anyhow, just as good as told me—that he couldn't stand it any longer."

"And then Jump did something for you. Helped you across a stream, didn't he? Isn't that funny? It's exactly what happened to me in Elkana. One day I saw a chance to get a girl out of a little trouble at school; a girl, you know, who wasn't friendly to me at all. But it must have made her understand how hungry I was to—to *belong,* to be one of her crowd, even if I had pretended not to care. Anyway, after that she couldn't do enough for me—kindnesses, I mean, and sacrifices of all sorts. I guess she felt guilty over never helping me before. She acted just the way you've been acting toward Jump."

"Aw, now!" protested Bunny, pretending to be absorbed in an acrobatic turn that was reaching its climax.

"Well, you have. Didn't you teach him a lot of things about being a Scout?"

"Ye-es."

"And didn't he pass his tenderfoot examinations last Saturday without a single slip?"

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"Ye-es."

"And haven't you made every last Black Eagle like him now?" pursued the relentless Molly.

"I didn't make them do it," corrected Bunny. "We just talked it over one night, and every fellow agreed to pretend he was meeting and judging Jump for the first time. It worked fine, too; and if this old circus hadn't come along to spoil things before we had a fair chance to—"

"Croaker!" mocked Molly. "He hasn't joined Campbell's yet, has he? And what do you mean by criticizing this circus? Did you hear, Mr. Hibbs?"

"Plain treason!" laughed the inventor. "The circus is the Scouts' doing, like the famous House That Jack Built." He closed his eyes dreamily. "This is the Lakeville sign at the station. This is the railroad folder that printed the picture of the Lakeville sign at the station. This is the show's route agent that saw the folder that printed the picture of the Lakeville sign at the station. This is the hustling, wide awake town the route agent visited that saw the folder that printed the picture of the Lakeville sign at the station. This is the patrol of Boy Scouts that created the hustling, wide awake town that the route agent visited that saw the folder that printed the picture of the Lakeville sign at the station. This is the circus that—"

"Help!" begged Molly. "You make me dizzy.

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Besides, I can't listen and watch at the same time, and I want to see those trained ponies and those people doing tricks on bicycles. Look, Bunny!"

The band played louder and faster. Horns roared; drums thundered. In the ring, the alert ponies broke from a mincing trot into a quick gallop. On the platform, the male cyclist began to pedal madly, with the other members dangling from his body at every conceivable angle. As the applause was growing in volume, the band crashed to the last note of the bar and ceased. In the very twinkling of an eye, the arena cleared.

"La-deez and gentle-*men,*" rang the voice of the scarlet-clad ringmaster, "it affords me vast pleasure to introduce to you the world's greatest casting aerial artists, kings of the trapeze, the Flying DeVallos!"

"Why, I know those men," Bunny told Molly, swelling with pride. "The first is Mr. Henderson, Jump's father. The next is Mr. Dean. And that last one is Mr. Reilly."

"But I thought their name was DeVallo."

"Only in the circus," explained Bunny patiently. Girls, of course, could never understand such things. "Now, you just watch what they do."

Far above, in the inverted V of the tent, two trapezes dangled idly. To one of these Mr. Reilly climbed; to the second, Mr. Henderson and Mr. Dean.

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While the other two loosed their hands from the bars and swung head-down, hanging by their knees, Mr. Dean pulled himself to a standing position. As the crowd stilled expectantly, Bunny caught the staccato signals:

"Right?"

"Right!"

Mr. Dean dived straight down. Even Bunny, wise in his lore of lofty tumbling, could not restrain a gulp of fear. Mr. Henderson's hands shot out. There was a jerk, a sudden unfolding that suggested the opening of a knife blade, and Mr. Dean was hanging safely, his wrists gripped by Mr. Henderson's strong, sure hands.

There was no wait for applause. Both men began to swing to and fro, like some huge pendulum. Again came the warning words of signal. This time Mr. Dean was cast through the air toward the other trapeze, to be caught and held by Mr. Reilly.

It was a wonderful exhibition. The Scouts, masters as they were of the low trapezes in their clubhouse, held their breath and alternately gasped and clapped till both their lungs and their palms smarted. And at the end, when Mr. Dean's thrown body curled like a ball, and he turned over and over, revolving so fast that he seemed a mere blur, the boys' admiration was ungrudging.

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As the men slipped down the ropes to the sawdust below, the ringmaster stepped forward once more and held up his hand for attention.

"La-deez and gentle-*men*," he cried, "bear in mind that the big show is not yet half over! I merely call your attention to the most daring, dangerous, death-defying feat of modern times! Something never before attempted in the his-to-ree of the world! THE LEAP FOR LIFE! Mr. Carlo DeVallo will now jump from the topmost point within the tent to a flying trapeze below! I thank you! Gentlemanly agents will now pass among you, selling tickets for the concert, which will take place immediately after the big show! Those remaining may occupy reserved seats!"

"This Leap for Life is the stunt Jump used to do," Bunny explained to Molly.

From the dressing-room came running a lithe figure in red tights. Without stopping to acknowledge the applause that greeted him, the boy put his foot in a loop and was drawn rapidly to a tiny platform near the tip of the ridgepole. Far to one side, and well below him, a swinging trapeze was set in motion. It seemed impossible that any human being could leap that distance and grip the slender bar. There was a protecting net below, to be sure, but it was only a little square. If he missed it—

"See that little fellow," said Roundy in a loud

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whisper, "that—that kid. I'll bet he isn't any older than we are. Well, that's who I'd like to be."

"Who wouldn't!" Specs' rejoinder was the same he had made months before, while he and Roundy gazed at the poster of the Flying DeVallos.

High on his perch, Carlo DeVallo balanced himself. The band blared steadily, but Bunny could see its leader watching from the corner of his eye. The daring youngster up there, with his head almost touching the canvas above, looked ridiculously young and small. Why, he couldn't be any older or any bigger than Jump Henderson.

Carlo DeVallo nodded. With a sweep of his baton, the band-master stilled the horns. The drums kept on, with muffled beat, rolling, rolling, rolling.

Crouching slightly, the boy gathered himself for the leap. All through the big tent, now grown strangely silent save for the mournful dirge of the drums, people sucked in their breath with little hissing whistles.

As the trapeze reached the farthest point of its arc, and halted for the tick of a second before it began its return swing, the boy jumped.

Bunny huddled in his seat. Beside him, Molly pressed hard against his shoulder, trying vainly to choke back a sob. Somewhere a woman cried out shrilly.

Like a scarlet meteor, the body of Carlo DeVallo

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flashed through the air. Bunny's eyes were on the trapeze now. It idled to its bottom point. It began to move slowly upward. It reached its final limit. Then, just as it balanced tremblingly before the return, two hands, very white by contrast with the red-sleeved arms, closed tightly about the hickory bar.

With a jerk, the trapeze catapulted forward. While it shot to a new height under this fresh impetus, Carlo DeVallo clung fast; but as it moved to its natural level, he dropped lightly to the net, and from there, with a neat handspring over the edge, to the ground below.

Horace Hibbs, as happy as a boy, was yelling at the top of his voice. Molly Sefton stamped her feet, and pounded somebody on the back, and did her best to whistle like Roundy and Specs. Of all the party, only Bunny was silent.

"What's the matter with you?" Molly demanded. "Wasn't that leap just too wonderful for anything?"

"Yes," agreed Bunny without enthusiasm, "only I wish he hadn't made it."

Molly whirled on him accusingly. "Did you want him to fall?"

"Of course not. I didn't mean that. But now he'll go on with the circus and—"

"Who'll go on with the circus? What are you talking about, anyhow?"

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"Carlo DeVallo," said Bunny dully. "Don't you see? Don't you understand?" He pointed a finger at the bowing boy who had made the Leap for Life. "Why, it's Jump himself, that's who it is! Jump Henderson!"

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CHAPTER XXVI

THE SCOUTS' HOUR

Eight o'clock that night found the Scouts of Black Eagle Patrol grouped about a camp fire on the clubhouse lawn. Like so many statues they sat, gazing silently into the flames. Mr. Stanton was speaking.

"Albertson, Gorse, Hinkle, Groat," he repeated, checking the names on his fingers. "Will any of them suit?"

Bunny lifted his head. "Mr. Albertson won't do," he said; "he isn't a boy at heart; he wouldn't understand. Mr. Gorse is too busy. Peter Hinkle can't get away from his work. Ben Groat likes to hike and hunt and fish by himself. I'm afraid, Mr. Stanton—"

He did not complete the sentence. Another silence fell. The bonfire flickered bravely and died down. Over on the circus lot, the band blared into the opening number of the evening performance.

"There must be somebody in Lakeville who will fill the vacancy," insisted Mr. Stanton thoughtfully; "somebody with the heart of a boy, with the clean enthusiasm for the task, with the power to command respect, with—"

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"Please," said a voice from the darkness beyond, "may I come up to the fire?" A shadowy form drew closer.

Eight Scouts and one Scout Master chorused a hearty invitation. Smiling his thanks, Horace Hibbs joined the group. "I hope," he apologized gently, "I am not intruding."

His smile was contagious. It lighted the circle like a beacon. The fog of gloom fled before it.

"Nobody," Mr. Stanton told him, "could be more welcome."

"Thank you," said Horace Hibbs. He watched the fire eat its way up a log and break into a cheery blaze. "I'm afraid I shall never grow up. Perhaps, like Peter Pan, I never want to. You see, I have just had a long talk with Mr. Gorse, and I am so bursting with the news that I simply have to tell somebody."

"Tell us," begged Bunny.

"Of course," agreed Horace Hibbs in mild reproof. "Why shouldn't I? You boys are my best friends; I feel like one of you myself. That's why I came straight here after I left Mr. Gorse. Well,"—he paused to beam upon them,—"well, he wants me to come into his Fair Play Factory. He wants to give me the finest and the most complete workshop in the country, with nothing to do but putter around in it to my heart's content, working out improvements and

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new devices. He wants to pay me a salary 'way and beyond what I ever suspected I should be worth to anybody. Do you understand, boys? It's the realization of my life ambition. I couldn't be much happier if—"

"If what?" prompted Bunny.

Horace Hibbs smiled. "You'll laugh, I suppose, when I tell you. I keep wishing I could be one of your crowd, one of you Boy Scouts. You don't think, do you," he asked with mock seriousness, "that I could make the National Commission believe I was fifteen instead of fifty, or get some special dispensation overlooking the years that haven't added to my age?"

Before Mr. Stanton answered, he put an unspoken question to each of the Scouts. From Bunny, patrol leader, to Sandy, Number 8, they bobbed their heads in vigorous approval.

"Mr. Hibbs," said the other man, "I have just announced to the patrol that business reasons compel me to move to Dunkirk. It is the county seat, as you know, and I have so many cases in court that I am no longer able to make Lakeville my home. As a result, I must resign as Scout Master, and the patrol is unanimous in asking that you be appointed my successor. Will you accept the position?"

Horace Hibbs stared unbelievingly about the little circle. Again the heads bobbed eagerly. "Please!"

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urged one voice; and, "Won't you?" chimed another; and, "We want you!" and, "Say, yes!" and, "Do!"

"Boys," began Horace Hibbs, "boys, I—" He lifted his eyes bravely, seeming not to care that they all saw the twitching lids. "Boys, there isn't any office in the world I'd rather hold than Scout Master of the Black Eagle Patrol."

After they were done cheering, and Mr. Stanton had promised to run over from Dunkirk to see them every few days, and had hinted that Lakeville might eventually become the county seat itself, the Scouts threw a new log on the fire. Quite as if this were some cue for which he had been waiting, Felix, the Magoon dog, came trotting forward.

"Huh!" said Roundy, "that's funny. He generally hangs around Jump. You don't suppose—"

Jump followed almost at the dog's heels. Without a word, he marched to the camp fire and edged into the group about it.

"Isn't—isn't it nearly time for your act?" Bunny asked with a show of diffidence, nodding toward the circus tents.

"I'm through with Campbell's," said Jump. There was neither defiance nor defeat in his tone.

"But—but you did your Leap for Life this afternoon."

"Sure. I wanted you fellows to see me do it."

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"Won't your father let you join the circus again?" demanded Specs flatly.

All of them expected an outburst of temper. Jump's face did redden a little more in the glow of the fire, but he answered quietly enough:

"He said I might, if I liked. I could go on with the show, or I could stay here, whichever I wanted to do most. My old job's waiting for me in the De-Vallo troupe, too. But—"

They waited in awed silence. Jump cleared his throat and flung an arm about Felix.

"My father's all right," he said loyally, "and so are Mr. Dean and Mr. Reilly, of course. But most of the people in a circus don't think about anything except their acts. You fellows know a million things they never will. You—you're prepared for whatever turns up. Outside the Big Top, those fellows would be as helpless as babies. They're"—he paused to twist Felix's ear affectionately—"they're nothing but a bunch of hicks."

Still nobody answered him. Mr. Stanton coughed suddenly, and covered his mouth with a handkerchief.

"So I told my father," continued Jump serenely, "that I guessed I'd rather stay with a live crowd of Boy Scouts in a wide awake town like Lakeville. I told him that I was a tenderfoot now, and that I would belong to the patrol when Sandy went away to school

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next week. He liked that; he knows you are regular fellows, and he wants me to learn everything you know, and be like you. I will, too. And—and I guess that's all."

Well, it was, so far as Jump and the patrol were concerned. He was back in the fold, humble and contrite, and he was welcome. The Black Eagles had won another victory.

There was one more caller before the fire was banked. It was Mayor Burbage, brisk and business-like and smiling. Everybody seemed to be smiling that night.

"I dropped around," announced Lakeville's mayor, "to reveal a state secret. A lot of people in this town seem to have gotten it into their heads that they are in your debt. Some of them came to me and asked what they could do by way of squaring the bill. I explained that you Scouts didn't work for pay, and wouldn't accept any, but that if they felt under any obligations, they might help both you and the town by keeping you right here a few more years. 'How?' they asked. 'By building a high school,' I told them. And that's precisely what they're going to do."

"Is it sure?" gasped Bunny when he found his breath.

"Sure? With Green and Simpson and the whole council behind it, and every last citizen waiting to

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vote yes? I should say it was sure. Mind you, too, it's no gift, no luxury; it's a community necessity. I see that now. Next year, over there on Mr. Albertson's lot, you'll see as trim and complete a high school building as there is in the State. The biggest favor you can do Lakeville is to enroll and attend. Good night, Scouts!"

Somewhere a clock struck nine. The camp fire burned to dull embers. Over on the circus lot, gasoline torches moved to and fro. The side-show tent was down and packed; the outer section of the main tent, that had housed the menagerie, was billowing to the ground. On the streets of Wide Awake Town, the crowds thinned. One by one, the store lights flashed out. Except for the audience under the Big Top, the day of days was ending.

Nap, official bugler of the Black Eagle Patrol, brought his horn from the clubhouse, and sounded the sweet, clear notes of "taps."

THE END

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